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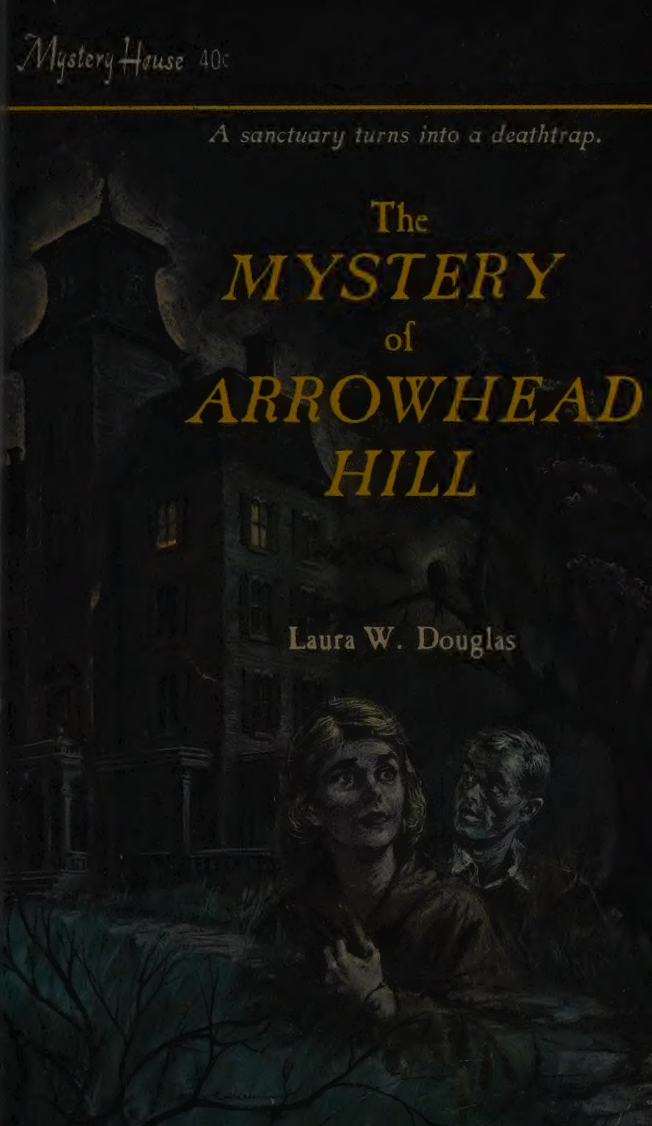
The *MYSTERY* of *ARROWHEAD HILL*

Laura W. Douglas



THE MYSTERY OF ARROWHEAD HILL

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AIRMONT PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
22 EAST 60TH STREET · NEW YORK 10022

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An AIRMONT BOOK published by arrangement with
Thomas Bouregy and Company, Inc.

PRINTING HISTORY
Bouregy edition published January, 1963
Airmont edition published October, 1964

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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY IN THE DOMINION OF CANADA
BY THE RYERSON PRESS, TORONTO
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE COLONIAL PRESS INC., CLINTON, MASSACHUSETTS

To
JACK

INTRODUCTION

RED MULVANEY is a roving reporter for the Anton, Missouri *Morning Star*. An expert at bleeding copy, he has been given the privilege of editing what you are about to read.

Red has a certain alliterative admiration for what he calls my "proclivity for preposterous participation in the picturesque," but no admiration, alliterative or otherwise, for my meandering and often abstruse paragraphs. He also deplores my habit of telling a story from the end to the beginning, and immediately deleted the opening sentence: "Whether I liked it or not, murder was waiting for me at Arrowhead Hill." I considered it a practical way to inform the reader that violence was coming. He said, "Tell it from the beginning."

I have tried.

PROLOGUE

ANYONE who owns a map of Ohio can find Cincinnati in the southwest corner. Most Cincinnatians know that their city, like Rome, is built on seven hills; know that its scenery rivals that of the Rhine Valley and that Oscar Robertson, the big O, played basketball for U.C. They also know that there is a suburban community named Indian Hill Village. However, there is no Faldman Road on Indian Hill, nor is there a family by the name of Sexton, or Orre, living in a home called Arrowhead Hill. If there are —road, home or people—they owe their identity to me. All incidents in The Mystery of Arrowhead Hill are fictitious, as are those persons who participate in them. Any resemblance to people, living or dead, is coincidental.

1

MONDAY 5 P.M.

IT was a beautiful June afternoon. Mother, Father and I were idling on the front porch of the manse waiting for Red to come to drive me to the airport.

"Virginia," Father said as he paced, his cane tapping rhythmically on the cement, "these Sextons. Never cared for them—shouldn't allow you to go. I have a strange feeling, so if you encounter any unusual circumstances, will you behave as a minister's only daughter, only child, should?"

"Why Marvin," Mother said, "Virginia is twenty-five years old, not a child. We can always depend on her."

"Not always," Father said dryly.

"I promise, Father," I told him. "I will steal only one apostle spoon. Would you like St. Peter?"

Father didn't smile, but there was no time to listen to one of his paternal lectures about what he calls my "devious manner of diverting the subject," because Red's car was stopping at the curb with a noise like a cement mixer full of boulders. Red climbed out and came up the walk.

"Don't take your father's words seriously," Mother whispered as she kissed me. Then, speaking louder, "Have a glorious time, dear, and remember every detail of the wedding. I'll want to hear all about it."

Red picked up my bags. Father scowled and Mother smiled as I waved them good-bye.

"Father thinks I'm going to meet unusual circumstances," I said as Red and I clanked down the street.

"Isn't that the norm?" said Red. "If you don't meet them, you make them."

"He'll stew until I get home," I went on, disregarding the insult.

"So will I."

"You?"

"Me."

"I won't," I said. "It will be heaven on earth. An entire week away from Loman and Lee's."

"I thought you enjoyed your job," Red snorted. "Some job—buying gifts for people who can't afford to buy gifts to give to someone who exchanges them for something else."

"I do," I answered, "and I have nothing against department stores. But I enjoy lots of things. Imagine—three days of nothing to do but eat lotus. What does lotus taste like?"

"Mush. Cold, corn-meal mush." Then Red said, "I don't like the Sextons."

"You don't know the Sextons."

"I know about them."

"Just what you've read in the paper—or what you wrote in the paper, and what I've told you."

"I know that Whitney Sexton, the multimillionaire scion of an old Cincinnati family, committed suicide four years ago. I know that his widow married before a year was out—"

"What does that prove?" I asked. "People commit suicide every day. Widows get married every day."

"But you aren't the maid of honor at the marriage of the daughter of the bereaved widow every day," Red said. "And you have an unholy affinity for mud—can't keep your feet from slubbing around in everyone's mud puddles."

"The Sextons do not have a mud puddle. Unfortunate circumstances occur in every family. You and Father! Honestly! You should both go to an old ladies' home—cross-stitch. I am not going to South Africa to take part in a blood rite—just as far as Cincinnati to walk down

an aisle with an innocent bouquet of stephanotis and six yards of satin ribbon. That's all. Absolutely all."

"Your friend Polly Sexton," Red said, following his own train of thought and ignoring mine, "sounds like an uninspired amoeba. Hasn't she made any friends in six years? Why does she choose her dear old roommate from Glendore Junior College—a place for backward girls, at best. I never could understand why your parents sent you there."

"It teaches a young lady to pour tea and pose," I said, "necessary arts for gracious living. Glendore taught me the difference between synthetic and synthesis, tempo and temporal—all the nuances. And Polly is not an uninspired amoeba. She is shy and quiet, not exactly pretty, was not attractive to callow college boys, but that does not mean she is a soulless protoplasm."

"Keep your temperature down," Red said. "Sing your alma mater, adore your Polly. But the Sextons are unsavory. Gin, be careful. I want to warn you—"

We glided gently into the rear bumper of a Falcon waiting for a red light.

"Warn me about what?" I asked, two miles and an argument later.

"Nothing," Red said. "A warning to you is a goad for you to do exactly what you please. But if you should hear or see anything out of the ordinary—"

"What is ordinary?" I asked.

"Stop interrupting. If you should hear or see anything out of the ordinary, don't ask questions of anyone, certainly not a Sexton, and let me know immediately."

"I will not," I said. "You didn't answer. What is ordinary? You're being foolishly apprehensive. Here I am, on vacation, anticipating a magnificent holiday among the elite where I will have a chance to fall in love with a best man and my *bon voyage* is anything but *bon*."

"Fall in love with the best man and I'll meet him behind the chicken house at dawn," Red said, taking the turn into the airport lane with screaming tires. Moments

later, we rattled to a stop behind a limousine at the terminal entrance.

As I walked to the plane I turned to see Red framed in the door beyond which no one but ticket holders are allowed, his hatless head glowing under a light and a furrowed frown on his forehead. He lifted a limp hand in reply to my jaunty wave of farewell, then disappeared.

I was strapped in my seat, a copy of *Vogue* on my lap, when the last passenger came hurrying down the aisle and sat beside me. He was short and rotund with twinkling eyes and pink cheeks, snow white hair and a neatly trimmed, snowy beard. If I had been four years old I would have bet my Eloise doll that he was Santa Claus. But I knew better. I had seen him before and he hadn't been flying over housetops urging on Donner and Blitzen; he had been in a police lineup at night court, booked as a pickpocket.

I shifted my purse to the window side as he settled himself, clicked his seat belt and opened one of Peterson's bird books. The airline hostess came down the aisle with her passenger list, asking for names and destinations. I learned that my seatmate was Felix Ponell, destination Cincinnati. He learned that I was Virginia Crane, destination Cincinnati.

"Ever been to Cincinnati?" he asked as she left us.

"Once."

"Beautiful city," he said, closing the book and marking the place with a crooked finger. "Has charm. The river drive with Kentucky climbing up the opposite bank is a magnificent sight—at night, too, with the boulevard lights a diamond necklace sparkling around the throat of the Ohio River."

I agreed with his poetic rhetoric. "Father has a Hurley etching of that view—daytime, of course," I said. "But I'm fonder of the old city. Mt. Auburn, Mt. Adams. It all makes you wish Mrs. Trollope could come back and eat some of her disparaging words."

"Ah, yes—Mrs. Trollope. Always admired her, though. An energetic woman. I'm fond of energetic women—they

get things done. You look the energetic sort, if you'll pardon my being personal."

"And you, too," I parried, "It takes energy to keep up with the birds."

"True," he said. "Birds are my vocation and I find them rewarding. Interesting creatures—birds. Not exactly lovable as pets, but they demand nothing. It equates."

By the time the hostess had brought our dinner trays I knew that starlings can rid a territory of every other bird and that man's crime in exterminating the passenger pigeon is a blot on the human escutcheon that can never be erased. I watched Felix Ponell's dexterous manipulations of the little eating tools with fascination, something I wouldn't have noticed if I hadn't known that his vocation had nothing to do with birds. We suddenly bumped in and out of an air pocket and he steadied both my tray and his with such effortless agility that I used the incident for an opening gambit.

"Thank you for saving my soup," I said. "Quick hands are such a comfort to have in emergencies."

"Quite," he said.

"I know an amateur magician," I lied, searching for a way to talk of manual dexterity, then compounded the lie with unfilial treason. "My Father. But I didn't inherit the sleight of hand ability. Father says it's practice—that if he had concentrated on his remarkable gift he could have been another Houdini or even a successful pickpocket."

"Possible," Felix Ponell chuckled. "Perhaps a successful bird-watcher or bird-photographer. It takes quick hands and eyes, coordinated, to observe or record the lightning movements of a flycatcher, a hummingbird."

I had met my match at changing the subject. Felix Ponell was as adept at it as he was in lifting a wallet, and from dinner to Cincinnati he gave such a long discourse on fowl with no opportunity for interruption that I felt plumed and feathered as we unbelted ourselves and prepared to leave the plane.

"It's been delightful to have you for a seat companion," the little man said, bowing his way into the aisle. "You

may not have deft hands, Miss Crane, but you have a listening ear, which is much more valuable. Old men are garrulous and appreciate being listened to. I hope you have a happy sojourn in this beautiful city and do try to attend a service at the new Christ Church on Fourth Street. It has caused a furor among the devout as far as architecture is concerned and the manner of worship in twentieth-century surroundings might interest your father. I understand his chuch is an edifice dating from the eighteen-nineties."

2

MONDAY NIGHT

PATRICK WIERE, Polly's fiancé, handled his imported horsepower with all the skill of a racing driver and we floated a foot above ground all the way from the airport: across the suspension bridge that spans the Ohio River from Kentucky, through Cincinnati's basin and suburbs, on and up into Indian Hill Village, a misnomer of magnitude. Here was not a hamlet at a crossroad but a vast, sprawling, hilly section where modern old-brick homes with family rooms and patios nestled in shaded subdivisions; where isolated ranch houses on sweeping acres stared with picture-window eyes at the old farm houses next door still hugging the road; where invisible estates at the end of wooded lanes were made homey by mail boxes on posts at the entrances.

We turned into one of the wooded entrances off Faldman Road, curled upward for half a mile and came to a stop in front of Polly's home. It was a cozy, thirty-room, pillared, elled Colonial cottage. I had been there once before and knew I wouldn't have to sleep on the couch.

Pat helped us out, then drove off. Polly ran up the steps, across the broad marble-smooth, grey-flagged porch to the front door and held it open for me. She called, "Mother, Norman, here she is. Gin's here."

We stood in a huge center hall in which a circular staircase hugged one wall and wound its way gracefully to the floor above. From an open doorway at the left of the hall a tall, lean man appeared. He came toward us, his hands outstretched in welcome.

"So this is Gin." Norman Orre took one of my hands in both of his. "How we've looked forward to seeing you. You know Polly refused to be married if you wouldn't be her maid of honor? And I well understand—beautiful—beautiful—"

"I told you she was pretty," said Polly.

"Ah—but there's something more than prettiness," Norman said.

Mrs. Orre entered the hall. She was gaunt, pale, subdued, self-effacing.

"It's not kind, keeping this child standing in the hall," she said, smiling wanly, putting her arms around my shoulders. "Show Gin where she is to stay, Polly, then join us for coffee."

"It's as lovely as I remembered, Polly," I commented as we left the room that I was to live in for the next three days. "I'll cherish every minute I spend barefooted on that luxurious grey carpet. It's like dehydrated fairy moss."

Polly gave me an impulsive hug. "I hope you do, darling. And I'll cherish these minutes. It's true, what Norman said, that I couldn't have faced this marriage without you. Someday I'll tell—when it's all over."

We had walked to the top of the stairs and Polly gripped the polished rail, then repeated, "When it's all over," and added, "If it is ever over."

We turned right at the bottom of the stairs and entered a drawing room that stretched toward the horizon. Chinese Chippendale, its patina complacently well-bred, glowed with decades of polishing. Chairs and draperies modestly minimized their superlative lineage to complement a Sargent portrait of a handsome, patrician, but blatantly green-eyed woman that hung on one wall. At the far end of the room was a hearth and as the evening was unseasonably cool, embers were dying between the firedogs. In front of the hearth stood two men.

We waded across the carpet and stopped beside a circular coffee table flanked by two couches. Polly introduced me to her brother, Crandall Sexton, and their cousin, Steven Sexton.

Everyone murmured snatches of nothing as Mrs. Orre, seated in a low, armless chair by the table, served coffee in egg shells that had been laid and hatched in Limoges.

Crandall Sexton was the ugliest man I had ever seen. I knew he was twenty-eight, but he could have been forty or sixty. His hair, like the fur of a terrier with mange, stuck out at odd angles. It was a lusterless yellow-brown and its short cut only accentuated the dozen cowlicks that created as many swirls. His forehead slanted back from a large, wide-nostriled nose and his teeth were short and small like those of a preschool child. As he leaned against the mantel and toyed with the handle of his cup I noticed that his hands were whitened with some sort of lotion.

Steven, the cousin, who stood beside Crandall at the hearth, resembled Polly. He had the same wheat-colored hair, the same cheekbones and jawline, the same blue eyes. But his nose was longer, ending abruptly as though the sculptor had cut off the end in a spirit of caprice.

"I'm sure Polly has exhausted you with talk of her wedding," Mrs. Orre was saying. "It can't be helped. Tomorrow you will meet the bridesmaids, Gin. The seamstress is coming in the afternoon for final fittings. I hope you approve of the colors Polly selected."

"I do," I assured her. "Polly's good taste never fails."

Mrs. Orre sighed. "There are so many details to attend to for a big wedding. I thought there would be nothing to do this final week, but the seamstress is a diva with temperament, though I admit she couldn't have finished your dress until you arrived even though the measurements you sent were exhaustive. She was so grateful that you had had some experience and sent more than hip, bust and waist measurements."

"That wasn't I," I said. "Mother's doing. She can contrive a French original from a picture in *Harper's Bazaar*."

Mrs. Orre talked on and on, about shoes, corsages, hose and the hairdresser who would come to give us a final combing. I listened with one ear, glancing now and then at Norman Orre as he sat in a wing chair, his long legs

crossed, smoking a cigarette in a thin ebony holder. Where had he come from? Why did Mrs. Sexton change her name so quickly? How would Polly feel walking down the aisle on his arm?

Steve asked for more coffee, then, carrying the cup back to the mantel shelf, said, "I've been an usher, even a best man, but this is the first time I've ever been backstage at a wedding. It's rather like getting a new play ready for opening night. And for only one performance. What a waste of costumes, time and talent."

Norman Orre carried on the metaphor. "And the mother of the bride is a composite producer, director, stage manager, scenic designer and wardrobe mistress. But it's a mother's privilege to run her daughter's wedding," Norman finished pleasantly.

"And what is a father's privilege, Norman?" Crandall asked. "Giving the bride away?"

"I'll be so privileged," Norman replied with no change of expression.

"You mean sell her, don't you?" Crandall paused, then went on in a singsong voice. " 'The time has come, the walrus said, to talk of many things—' "

"Crandall!" Mrs. Orre said, beginning to rise from her chair.

" 'Of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings,' " he continued. "Of brides and grooms—"

He stopped, encompassing us all with a sweeping bloodshot glance, "—and homicide, of Janus wedding rings—of—"

It was as though we were hypnotized; no one moved or spoke as Crandall held us all suspended on the preposition. The next line came in a satirical, instructive tone with no rhythm.

"You know about Janus—good old Janus—kept the gates of Heaven—remember? Had two faces. We all have two faces, haven't we?" He raised his voice and pointed an accusing finger at Mrs. Orre. "Haven't we, Mother? Two faces. Want me to tell you what yours are like—your two faces? No, you don't. Can't blame you. Got two faces my-

self. Got three faces, four faces, five, six, pick up sticks, seven, eight, lay them straight, nine, ten, a big fat hen, eleven—eleven—"

"Cran!" Polly cried. "Stop—stop!"

"Eleven, eleven, eleven," Crandall chanted, the numbers ringing above Polly's voice. "The eleventh of November, the eleventh floor."

He swept his arm along the mantel shelf and the cup and saucer crashed to the hearth. He looked at them as though they had plummeted down of their own volition, then brought his gaze back to his staring audience, shook his head and rubbed a hand across his eyes.

"Forgive me, my adoring relatives," he said. "And you, too, Miss Crane. Deplorable manners." At one side of the hearth was a door and he lurched to it, opened it and, clutching at the frame for support, pushed himself through the doorway and disappeared. Steve followed him quickly.

Mrs. Orre put a hand to her forehead. I could see the knuckles whiten as the clenched fingers seemed to dig into her very bones. "Do forgive him," she said in a hoarse whisper. "Do, please."

Polly went to her mother and knelt beside her. She pulled the clutching hand down and held it in hers.

"We do, dear. We do—we always have. Go to bed, Mother. You're tired."

Mrs. Orre, the hostess now, lifted her head high. "Yes, I am tired," she said, arranging her features in a fixed smile, the mirthless smile that is a façade for every emotion from lust to disgust.

Norman was on his feet and, taking Mrs. Orre's arm, helped her from the chair. They both said a quiet, courteous good-night and left the room.

If there is anything more embarrassing than stumbling onto a family's dirty linen, it's watching them wash it. Now was not the time to sit up all night exchanging nostalgic schoolgirl anecdotes with Polly. Glendore was another time, another life, both of them over, and the long silence after Norman and Mrs. Orre left the room was

evidence that Polly had no desire to confide in me. Wordlessly, we walked into the hall, up the stairs and parted with mutual murmurs about sleeping well.

MIDNIGHT

Arrowhead Hill
Faldman Road
Cincinnati, 43

Dear Red:

I'm following your instructions because there may be a mud puddle. This room is in French Provincial —that's furniture with a soul—and the desk is equipped with stationery, a pen with ink in it and stamps. I'll send this airmail, special delivery and you should get it by tomorrow night.

On a long drive from the airport I learned that the wedding, Thursday afternoon at five, will be an old-world, garden affair with portable altar, organ strains wafted from the morning room, and, should it rain, a square mile of canopy in reserve. It will be attended by the Four Hundred, assorted relatives and a few strays. There are to be last-minute fittings, a family dinner in the city tomorrow night, the rehearsal dinner on Wednesday night, luncheon at a friend's home on the wedding day. Half a hundred people will be cluttering the landscape and I'll forget their names a second after I've met them, but they won't be important. These are the principals I met tonight.

1) Crandall Sexton, Polly's brother. He was abroad during the years I knew Polly, so this was my first encounter with him. He's awesomely ugly—has the tortured look of a Doré sinner in purgatory. He was drunk. As we were having coffee he horrified us all, particularly his mother, by commenting on two-faced Janus, on the date of his father's death and on homicide. He referred to the ceremonial giving-away of the bride as selling her.

2) Steven Sexton. A nice cousin here from Balti-

more for the wedding. Steven's age, I would say. Twenty-six or -seven.

3) Mrs. Orre, Polly's mother. When she was Mrs. Sexton she was insufferable—clairvoyant in her choice of words, selected them like rapiers on a rack, picked out the longest and sharpest to impale her victims with. I'm sure she is one of the reasons Father is fretting. She tried to have Polly's room changed at Glendore when she discovered who her roommate was—didn't like her daughter slumming with the clergy. Neither the dean nor Polly would co-operate, so Mrs. O. retaliated by being as rude to me as she could. And that's rude. But not tonight. She met me with a welcoming hug. Metamorphosis is the word here. She's like a hot rod's souped-up jalopy on a drag strip that was doing eighty-five and suddenly went into reverse. She looks, talks and acts as though she's going to split down the middle.

4) Norman Orre, the new husband, is a dear. Sixty or older, with a receding hairline and heavy black brows hanging over deep-set, dark eyes. He has an easy, sophisticated manner, almost courtly. Have no idea what his profession is—if anything—and no idea where he came from. He didn't come from the Middle West. No harsh vowels. He almost has an accent.

5) Patrick Wiere, the bridegroom, about as Irish as macaroni. At least six-feet four with shoulders like a football back. Dark eyes, skin and hair. He drives an imported magic carpet that was Polly's gift to the groom. During the ride from the airport when Polly and I discussed everything, even you, he mentioned that he, too, was once interested in journalism but that there was no money in it. I assured him there was, that an enterprising reporter could use blackmail to ease himself into retirement in a few years. It took two minutes of explaining to make him realize it was a funny (ha-ha) joke. His asides are caricatures of quips; he has a slow, cliché-ridden mind and eyes that would undress Miss America on the boardwalk. I don't like him. He works at some-

thing nebulous in Manhattan—something to do with the theatrical world—costuming, scenery, assistant to assistant, publicity? Polly has been vague about it. They sat beside one another at a matinee of *Aida* and the love affair started before the final curtain. Seems to have no family, at least none was mentioned. None is in evidence, though two of his friends are arriving Wednesday morning from New York. Best man and usher. Pat came to Arrowhead Hill last Saturday.

6) Polly you know about. She looked lovely tonight in amber beads and a bubble haircut. She's still the same—shy and quiet—but there's something more now. She's upset, concerned, bothered and, I believe, not ecstatically happy as a bride should be. You could be right. If she's in love with Pat maybe she is an amoeba.

And last, Felix Ponell. He has nothing to do with the people I have mentioned so I won't give him a number. And I may as well confess. I told a whopper and got caught. Felix Ponell sat beside me on the plane. He is the little white-haired man we saw in the police lineup at night court a few years ago. Remember—booked as a pickpocket? He loves and talks birds. I wanted to talk about pocket-picking, so, as a start, I told him Father was an amateur magician. When we parted he let me know that he was aware that Father is a minister. Made me feel an utter fool. This is only extraneous chatter, but I thought you might be interested in knowing I haven't lost the ability to trip over my tongue.

Now for my own conclusions about the mud. Whitney Sexton may have been murdered. Crandall must know about it—perhaps they all do. I was terribly fond of Polly's father. He used to take Polly and me to New York for weekends, getting fourth-row seats at the theatres, catering to our omniverous appetites in exotic restaurants, being a perfect host. He had a whimsical sense of humor and was never a bore. Why would anyone kill him?

Don't breathe a word of this to Father. He's a dear, unworldly man who must be protected from reality and his only child.

Dutifully yours,
Gin

I punched the down pillow, redolent with lavender. I tossed. I turned. I curled and uncurled. I stared into the night. A door closed across the hall. I looked at the luminous dial on my traveling clock. It said one-thirty. Was Crandall stumbling into bed or was Steve's room across from mine. Or Pat's? What had happened to Pat? He hadn't joined us for coffee.

3

TUESDAY MORNING

AT six o'clock the next morning I was wide awake, trying to finish a dream that had promised some tantalizing developments in subconscious perception. It was no use. I propped myself on an elbow and surveyed the room. How pleasant—soft greys and pale yellows with a wondrous splash of purple on a slipper chair, as though Matisse had thrown his paint pot at it.

I tossed back the covers, pattered over to the desk and re-read the unsealed letter to Red. He might be interested in pictures of the people I had described; certainly pictures must have been given to the Press when the engagement was announced, though a paper seldom prints one of the intended groom. Had there been parties? Would there be candid shots of them? Had Pat, Norman Orre, Mrs. Orre or Crandall been recorded in print?

I showered and dressed quickly. Closing the bedroom door behind me, I paused in the hall and listened for sounds of other showers, other feet. There were none. I stood for a moment orienting myself. My room was in the main part of the house to the rear. Adjacent to it was another room; across the hall were two more. At the front of the house, on either side of the stairs, were other doors, four of them. The ells, bisecting the center hall, had two rooms in each of them, and I recalled a sewing room at the end of one ell, opposite the stairs leading to the attic. Twelve rooms. By Wednesday night they would all be occupied.

I hesitated for a moment at the base of the stairs, my hand on the satin swirl of the banister. Where did Mrs. Orre keep old newspapers? I turned left and entered the dining room. Over a banquet table, its leaves modestly hanging to the floor on either end, was a crystal chandelier whose pendants caught the early sunlight and twinkled at me with prismatic splendor. I gave the mahogany sideboard a sympathetic pat as I went by, for it audibly groaned under half a ton of Sheffield plate. I pushed through another door and entered the kitchen.

I had never been in the kitchen before. An ox could have been barbecued in one of the wall ovens and all of Joseph Smith's wives preparing supper wouldn't have bumped one another. In the wall opposite me were two doors, one at either end of a long counter space. I selected one, crossed the room and put my hand on the knob just as the door opened from the other side. I listed gently against the largest bosom in southern Ohio.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I said, righting myself and stepping back.

The woman in front of me filled the doorway. Three pink chins cascaded down into the neck of a blue uniform and every seam in the dress seemed to be hanging together out of sheer determination.

"I was looking for a newspaper," I said as she billowed past me, closing the door behind her.

"The morning paper is in the mailbox," she told me.

"Not the morning paper. I'm looking for old ones. Some with Polly's pictures in them; I want to enclose one in a letter to a friend of mine."

"Don't know as there've been any pictures. Only the engagement one eight months ago and those papers are gone. Orres don't like publicity. There was a time *she* did. Fat chance they'll have keeping photographers away from this shindig, but Polly, she wouldn't have it no other way —had planned her wedding with her papa when she was a tyke not big enough to know what a wedding was all about." Abruptly, the woman stopped talking. "Do you want your breakfast?" she asked. "No one gets up until after eight and breakfast starts at eight-thirty, but if

you're hungry I'll fix you some now. Mackerel—roe—bacon—eggs—cereal?"

"Eggs," I answered. "Up. Could I go for the paper before you cook them?"

"If you like walking. Grey Faldman usually brings it when he comes. It's a quarter of a mile down there."

"Will it take me longer than fifteen minutes? I'm starving."

"Depends on how fast you walk. It would take me an hour." She surveyed me critically, one hand on the refrigerator door. "Who are you?"

"Virginia Crane. I visited Polly the year we graduated from Glendore. You were on vacation. I used to help Polly demolish the cookies you sent her."

"Oh, the maid of honor. You remember the boxes I sent Polly! That was when her papa was alive. Things aren't the same now. Different. Not good either." She scowled and put oranges on a cutting board. "I'll have your breakfast ready pretty quick—you'd better go."

"What is different, Maud?"

"You remember my name!" she said, pleased. "I'll not say any more. The less you say around here, the better. Been here twenty-two, twenty-three years and I can tell the difference, but I'm not saying. If you've a letter to mail, put it in the box. The postman comes at noon."

The mailbox at the end of the lane was the size of a small cave. I pulled out the New York *Times,* the *Wall Street Journal* and the Cincinnati *Enquirer,* placed my letter inside, pulled up the flag, then stood hesitating. The mail pickup wasn't until noon. Was there some way to get a letter off sooner? I was standing, still indecisive, when an old car came over a rise. I opened the box, took out the letter, stepped into the middle of the road and waved my arms. The car came to a gasping stop and an old man rolled down a window and stuck his head out from the driver's side.

"Never pick up hitchhikers, girlie, too dangerous. You shouldn't stand in the middle of the road. Lucky for you I got good brakes."

"I'm not hitchhiking," I said, "Could you mail a letter?

I understand the postman doesn't get here until noon."

"Happy to oblige. Got mail of my own to get off." He picked some envelopes from the seat and waved them at me. "Going right to the post office in Milford. Just ordered a new rake for my mower. You know what they want for them? Awful! It takes everything a man can scrape together to keep his equipment going. I could tell those government men a thing or two about inflation, believe you me. You visiting up there on Arrowhead Hill? Come for the big wedding, I reckon. Mighty fancy goings-on around here. Too bad Mr. Sexton ain't alive. As fine a man as ever lived, Mr. Sexton. There's no figuring why the good Lord lets some die and leaves others that ain't worth a hoot in a holler. It ain't for me to question His ways, but I could do a better job when it comes to getting rid of the ornery ones. And let me warn you, girlie—it's likely you'll be rubbing elbows with some onery ones. Mind your p's and q's."

"Who are the onery ones?" I asked.

"Ain't saying, but I'll tell you this. Don't you go poking around that lake at night." He let out the clutch, waved a yellow, bony hand and chugged off as I called a thank-you. I watched him disappear, then started back toward the house and had gone scarcely a hundred feet when I heard a car turn from the road into the lane, idle for a moment, start on. A ranch wagon pulled up beside me and stopped.

"Going my way?" asked a young man.

"I suppose so. It's the only way to go, isn't it?"

"Right. Hop in and I'll take you unless you'd rather walk."

"I was going to run. I can't wait much longer for an egg."

He leaned across the seat, opened the far door as I walked around the car. I sat beside him and smelled the heavenly aroma of strawberries. The back of the wagon held a crate of them and there were rush baskets filled with green onions, radishes, lettuce and watercress, all dewy and trimmed.

"You picked up the papers," he remarked.

"Yes." Then, with a glance over the back of the seat, I indicated the load he was carrying. "I hope Maud can bake shortcake."

"She can. Just hope Polly doesn't eat it all."

I wondered how this attractive guy would know about Polly's appetite. He was certainly attractive. Broad, strong hands on the steering wheel. Clean, pressed khaki from shoulder to shoe. Thick, curly, brown hair cut short above a lean, tanned face.

"Do you know Polly?" I asked.

"Since the beginning. Better than you do."

"No one knows a girl better than her roommate."

"Which rommate?"

"Glendore. I'm Virginia Crane. And you?"

"I'm the guy who lost the ball," he said. Grey Faldman. Our property adjoins the Sextons'."

I remembered now. His name hadn't registered when Maud had mentioned it, but I recalled the times Polly had spoken of him. His family had lived on the Hill for generations, long before it became fashionable, and Faldman Road was named for his great-grandfather.

"Here for the wedding, I suppose," he said. "Will you give Polly my best, tell her I hope she'll be very happy."

"Why? You don't look like the sort who sends messages."

"What sort do I look like?"

"You look like a man who knocks down a door to deliver them in person."

We had reached the top of the hill and as we swept around a curve of blooming floribundas to the back of the house he turned and glanced at me with cold hazel eyes.

"I was like that once," he said, bringing the wagon to a slow stop, "but there are too many doors. You can break an arm—or your head."

"Did you ever try knocking down that door?" I asked, tilting my head toward the Sexton home.

"If you mean, did I ever ask Polly to marry me—no. You don't ask three or four million dollars to live in an Oregon forest."

"What's wrong with an Oregon forest?" I asked.

"It's full of trees," he said, turning off the ignition. Then he smiled at me. "What are you, part rabbit hound? I don't discuss my personal life with strangers."

"I'm never a stranger after five minutes and I don't gossip, so you needn't worry."

"I must have felt that or I wouldn't have said a word. Sorry I won't see more of you."

"Weren't you invited to the wedding?"

"My regrets were mailed weeks ago," he said and clicked the handle on the car door, pushed it open and got out.

With the morning papers tucked under one arm and a basket of onions dangling from one hand, I started toward the door to the kitchen, turned to see him standing, balancing a large round basket on a shoulder. The sun shadowed the planes of his face and framed, he could have hung on the walls of the Hermitage, the Metropolitan or my bedroom.

I finished breakfast where Maud had set a place at one of the glass-topped wrought-iron tables on a screened porch. No one joined me. Glancing through the papers, I saw that they were still full of the same news: variations on the themes of the Cold War, integration versus segregation, and chicanery in high places. I would walk to the lake. I had forgotten about the lake until the old man had mentioned it.

The lake had been one of Whitney Sexton's delights. Though in a natural hollow, it was artificial, and was stocked with fish. Behind the garage, I found a graveled path which soon gave way to one that was nothing more than a swathe cut through low growth and which, in turn, gave way to woods. A five-minute walk through the dappled morning shade and I suddenly saw the lake stretching before me. It was surrounded by trees except for a clearing by the path where a small boathouse in which canoes and a rowboat were stored hugged the shore. Next to the boathouse was an enormous maple, uprooted, its upper trunk and branches lying in the water. I kicked off my flats, climbed on the tree and

walked down the mossy bark to the point where the trunk dipped. There I sat down and dangled my feet in the cold water.

I could hear a crow from a lookout across the lake cawing a raucous warning. Three buzzards sailed lazily overhead. There was a whir above my shoulder and then a flat stone skipped across the water and sank noiselessly. I turned to see Grey Faldman. He climbed onto the tree trunk and came toward me. "You again," he said. "Are you a nature lover or a girl athlete?"

"Both," I answered. "Could I ask you some questions?"

"Sure. As long as I don't have to answer them."

"What's the matter with Mrs. Orre?" I asked.

"She was born mean," came the ready answer.

"I'm not interested in the way she was born. What happened to her?"

"I hope something awful. Why?"

"Because she isn't the same person I knew as Mrs. Sexton."

"I haven't seen her since she was Mrs. Sexton, so I can't answer your question."

"That's odd," I said. "I thought you and Polly—you and Crandall were friends."

"We are—or were. Suppose I explain. We have common property lines—the Sextons, us. Dad is a farmer. We supply Arrowhead Hill with garden produce during the growing season. Besides farming, Dad has a crew that uses our equipment for plowing, mowing, haying, baling. We keep the underbrush cut, mow the road shoulders, hay the fallow fields." He pointed toward one side of the lake. "That's what we're doing right now. I followed the crew around as a kid—worked with it when I grew older. Cran's approximately my age and he loved tagging along. Still does. In fact, he's coming down later this morning and we're going to try to get this tree out of the lake. It's been here all winter."

"Is Crandall mean too?"

"Cran—mean?" Grey laughed. "He can't stand baiting a fishhook. Don't you know Cran?"

"He was away when I visited here before. I met him for the first time last night. He's rather unusual." Grey was silent. "He acts strange, as though he's worried about something. Have you any idea what it could be?"

"If I had I wouldn't tell you," Grey said curtly.

Beyond him, the buzzards were circling lower and lower, the center of their circle seeming to be far behind the boathouse.

"There must be some loathsome carcass back there," I said, pointing. Grey turned, looked and shrugged.

"I'd better go bury it," he said. He walked the length of the tree trunk and swung himself off with the aid of a hand on a gnarled root. I followed, jumped down, retrieved my shoes on the shore, slipped my damp feet into them and walked through the woods after Grey's figure. A few feet beyond the woods Grey stopped. I could see only his head and shoulders above luxuriant weeds. He stood, unmoving.

"They've gone," I cried. "The buzzards have gone." I pointed once more to the sky where the birds were winging their way across the lake.

"Stay where you are," he commanded me.

I was beside him in a moment and wished I weren't.

"Who is she?" I whispered.

"A dead woman," Grey said. "A very dead woman." He hurried away, I stumbling after him. "I'll report to the police," he said. "Better not mention it at the house. And ask Maud for some yellow laundry soap—lather yourself good, at least three times in a shower. Poison ivy back there."

4

TUESDAY AFTERNOON

I TOOK a shower, following Grey's instructions, and lathered myself over and over with a bar of Werk's Tag soap. An old Cincinnati soap, Maud had said, no longer made and worth its weight in uranium, "—so, Virginia Crane, don't you let it sit in a wet soapdish and turn to jelly." She wanted it back.

As I toweled my legs I could see again the crumpled ones of the dead woman. As I tilted my head, drying my chin, I could see her neck, purpled with hideous bruises, and her tongue, thick and lolling. As I stood, stripped, in front of the door mirror, I would see her, pathetically naked, with not even a fig leaf—but, unfortunately, she was past caring about modesty.

By the time I was dressed and downstairs the household had wakened and wandered down for breakfast, so I joined them on the porch for coffee. Pat was scratching his wrists and the backs of his hands.

"You have it, too?" Cran asked.

Pat looked at him. "Have what?"

"Poison ivy."

"I don't know, do I?" Pat held out a hand and Cran examined it.

"You have it. There's lotion upstairs. I'll give you some."

"We spray, we cut, we root out and it still persists—it's everywhere," Mrs. Orre complained. "How pleasant the country would be if there were no noxious weeds."

"My dear," Norman said, "is that what you want?"

Mrs. Orre didn't answer, because a maid interrupted, not coming with hot coffee but an apologetic announcement.

"Mrs. Orre, the Indian Hill Rangers would like to see you."

"But they weren't to come until tomorrow," Mrs. Orre said querulously, "I told them tomorrow. That is soon enough to give instructions about traffic."

"I'm sorry, madam, they want to speak to you now."

Mrs. Orre left and returned within a minute. She stood in the doorway, silently looking at us as we munched, sipped and smoked. Norman put down his fork.

"What is it, Janet?" he asked.

"A woman," his wife said in a voice so low it was scarcely audible. "A dead woman—a murdered woman—behind the boathouse. They want to speak to all of us—each of us—separately. Will you come, please, Norman."

I was the last to be summoned to the morning room to face the police.

"We know you only arrived last night," a brusque but kindly uniformed man said, "but young Faldman told us you were with him when he discovered the body. What were your observations?"

"She was young," I answered, "she was beautiful, she was dead and she didn't have any clothes on."

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

"Neither you nor Grey Faldman touched her, removed anything from her or disposed of anything close to her?"

"All we did was look. Looking was enough."

"Had you ever seen her before?"

"Never."

"Tell us about your arrival last night."

I described the arrival with no embellishments, omitting Cran's strange outburst and my own thoughts.

"What time did you go to bed?"

"Midnight, maybe later."

"Did you notice or hear anything you might construe as out of the ordinary? Were others still up when you retired?"

"I heard a bedroom door close long after I'd gone to bed, but I'm not sure that's extraordinary. I often go to the kitchen at two o'clock in the morning for a peanut-butter sandwich. Other people might like peanut butter."

"Were you acquainted with all the people you saw last night?"

"Just Polly Sexton and her mother."

"Did the others impress you as being disturbed? Were they, uh—normal?"

"That's like the peanut butter, sir. I don't know what normal is when I meet a person for the first time. Normal for some is abnormal for others."

"True, Miss Crane, but is there nothing you could tell us that might help?"

"Help you do what?" I asked.

"Identify the woman—find the person who killed her."

"No."

"That will be all."

Polly and I sat on one of the beds in my room, facing each other tailor fashion. Verbally, we had sparred, not really talked. I hadn't been able to ask about the behavior of Crandall, about the peculiar change in her mother's personality, even about Pat and her feelings for him. She had given me no opening, only expressed regret and sympathy for the murdered woman, then ambiguously said:

"How inconsiderate. Why did the cat have to do her dance of death on our back fence? She was a cat, wasn't she? You saw her."

"Yes, I saw her. She was young, voluptuous and beautiful." I reconsidered. "No, she wasn't beautiful—grossly pretty describes her better."

"No refinement?"

"What is refinement?"

"Gin, please, you always answer a question with a question. You know what I mean and I said cat because that's what comes to the lake. The back road is the only way in by car and we have to keep it open for trucks and tractors. There are three signs, *Private Drive, No Trespassing* and *Dead End,* yet every Monday morning there are cases of beer cans and half a dozen empty bottles by the boathouse."

"Then she doesn't concern you," I said. "If that's the sort she was, perhaps she deserves what happened to her. No—I take that back. No one deserves what happened to her. It's just a sordid, unfortunate occurrence."

There was a knock on my door and a bridesmaid announced her arrival and that of her companions. Mrs. Purdough, the seamstress, had also arrived and was ready for the final fittings. We went to the sewing room, where our dresses, matching shoes under each one, hung on a rack in soft-coral, silken splendor. Mrs. Purdough was satisfied with everyone but me; I was the only one who had to be tucked in here and nipped in there, so she and I were alone when Fedder, the chauffeur, came to deliver the letter. The backs of his hands were covered with white lotion. I held the letter while Mrs. Purdough clucked and pinned. In the upper left corner of the envelope the name and address of a loan company were still discernible under a hasty, penned scribbling. My name and address were scrawled under the scratched-out name and address of Mr. Levan Mulvaney.

Released at last, I went to my room just as the luncheon gong sung its golden notes, tore open the envelope and read what was written on two sheets of paper torn from a notebook.

Dear Gin,

This should catch the next plane out as I'm writing it ten minutes after your departure.

There was a passenger hurrying to catch the plane you flew out on, a little white-haired man, the same man we saw in the police lineup at night court—I forget how long ago. Remember—the pickpocket

who fainted? The diabetic? You may not remember my dissertation on pickpockets, so I'm going to repeat it. They're organized with top brass; they usually travel in pairs and have territories like salesmen; if one is caught, bail is there the next morning and the culprit invariably forfeits it and moves on to another territory; pickpockets return wallets, identification and credit cards, drivers' licenses, etc., so the victims, poorer only in cash but not inconvenienced, consequently don't press charges. For the top brass pickpocketing is as lucrative as most other rackets, for they get a cut on every take. Without the protection of the brass the boys in the field would languish in jail for months, so they need that protection. Now— The police thought they had cornered the guy at the top, but whoever it was mysteriously disappeared—disappeared at the same time as Whitney Sexton's suicide. Sexton may have been the man. If he was, the scepter had to pass to someone else. Perhaps to that little man we saw. Maybe he's working with the ex-Mrs. Sexton, because I know they are closing in on the Southern Ohio, Northern Kentucky territory—the police I mean. I didn't tell you this before you left because you'd look under your bed every night for a thug, but I think it's more than concidence that the pickpocket was flying to Cincinnati. If he changed planes I'm all wet, but if you noticed him, if, in particular, you know that he stayed in Cincinnati, let me know. It's a wonderful world.

Red

Luncheon was over and we watched the bridesmaids leave in a caravan, heading toward the country club and an afternoon of following the bridle trail across country. I could have used a horse myself but instead went to the library to help Polly open the white-ribboned boxes that had been arriving all day. Pat and Steve joined us. Steve unwrapped and untied, Polly scribbled on backs of cards, tucked them out of sight under gifts, and called

off names, coupled with descriptions of the offerings, to Pat, who jotted them down in a notebook. I rolled ribbon and stacked boxes.

"King Solomon's mines," Steve groaned as we finished. "What will you do with all this junk, Polly?"

"Junk!" I exploded. "You could pawn those Revere bowls and spend a month at Monte Carlo."

"With Princess Grace?" Steve asked.

"No, you have to find your own princess," I said.

"You haven't seen Gin's present," Polly said. "I'd rather have it than all of this." She swirled an arm as though she were pushing all the silver and crystal into the waste basket, got up and lifted the tissue from a limp square at the end of one of the long, white linen-covered tables set up for the gift display.

The flag had fifty stars.

"Don't put flags on the floor," Steve reprimanded her. "Our flag never touches the ground. All Girl Scouts know that."

"I was only showing you," Polly said, gathering it up. "I want to hang it."

"Didn't someone send you a sterling-silver flagpole?" Steve asked.

"Not yet," Polly said. "Steve, you know where Father kept that tool kit in the attic. It has everything in it. We could tack the flag up there on the top bookshelf. See if you can find the kit."

"I'll go, Polly," Pat said eagerly. "It's time I got accustomed to taking orders—running your errands. Where is it?" He walked quickly to the door.

"No, darling, for if it isn't where it's supposed to be, Steve will find it. It should be under the cue rack—in that funny little chest. Remember—where the loving cup is?"

"Sure. Want to climb a mountain, Gin?" Steve asked.

We went to the attic. It was a huge paneled room with one end enclosed for storage space. There were built-in seats across one wall, a pool table, a ping-pong table, a poker table surrounded with chairs. Steve looked in the chest under the cue rack, showed me the tin loving cup

with all the names on it. The Sextons—all the cousins—had had a pool tournament that lasted for years and the cup had passed from winner to winner.

"It's not here," he said. "Move."

I got up from the windowseat where I had been sitting and looking out over the hills. Steve shoved the long leather cushion to the floor, lifted a hinged door. It was one of three sections, so I shoved a cushion to the floor and lifted a hinged door. There were golf clubs, tennis and badminton rackets, ping-pong paddles, ball gloves, skis, boxed games, all in a jumble. Steve rummaged and I rummaged. I lifted a Monopoly box and underneath was a wad of clothes. I saw the collar of a blouse, the buckle of a blue belt hanging from skirt loops, a four-inch thread of a plastic heel, the sleeve of a sequined sweater and the decorated side of a lucite purse, its gaudy flowers hiding the contents.

"Here it is," Steve said, putting the toolbox on the floor and closing his section of windowseat. "Aunt Janet isn't the housekeeper she was. She would never allow this mess if she were supervising as she did when Uncle Whit was alive."

I replaced the Monopoly box as he moved to close the door on the section in which I had been looking. He lifted the cushions for me, put them back. "Now for the flag-raising," he said.

Down in the library Steve stood on the arm of a chair and tacked the flag to the top shelf. A backdrop of red, white and blue blazoned behind sparkling crystal and gleaming silver.

We saluted and were halfway through the "Star-Spangled Banner" when Norman appeared in the doorway and joined in the anthem with a surprisingly pleasant baritone.

"Betsy Ross would never recognize it," he said after the last note had died.

"No," Steve said, "it's a busy flag now, full of orbiting satellites—really star-spangled. Oh, hello, Aunt Janet, I hope we didn't agonize your discriminating ear."

"It was lovely," Mrs. Orre said, entering the room, "but you may not feel like singing when I tell you that Maud has just informed me that the maids have left. Both of them."

"Mother—no!" Polly gasped. "Why?"

"Isn't it obvious? They're frightened. Maud is calling the agency and I've told her to have it send any sex and any color if they're honest and experienced. I want to ask each of you to make your own beds, keep your rooms in order. Neither Maud nor I will have time to instruct new servants in detail and Fedder can't take over maids' duties."

Having made my own bed since I could chin myself on the footboard, I didn't feel underprivileged on hearing Mrs. Orre's instructions. I sympathized with her. A wedding, a houseful of guests to be fed, pressed and entertained with no maids would reduce the most sophisticated hostess to tears or blasphemy.

"It's four-thirty," Mrs. Orre said. "You all have exactly one hour to dress. Please be on time; the aunties don't like to be kept waiting." She walked to the tables and started looking at the gifts, lifting them to inspect the cards and see who the donors were. Steve, Pat and Norman left and I was halfway to the door when Fedder appeared with his arms laden. Polly started unwrapping more gifts.

"What is this nasty tool kit doing here?" Mrs. Orre asked, lifting the metal box from the end of a table.

"That?" Polly said. "Oh—we needed it to hang the flag. I forgot to tell Steve to put it back."

"Let me." I volunteered. "I know the way and know where it belongs."

"Would you, Gin? Thanks, darling. In the little chest under the cue rack. And I'll see you on the terrace at five-thirty. Simple dress—nothing elaborate tonight."

I went to the attic, put the kit in the little chest under the cue rack, then went directly to the windowseat. I pulled off the cushion, lifted the door, shoved the Monopoly game to one side and picked up the lucite purse from the wad of clothing. The clothes weren't the sort

that Polly or anyone at Arrowhead Hill wore except, perhaps, for one of the domestics. I sat on the floor and dumped the contents of the purse in my lap. With a handkerchief wrapped around my fingers I replaced a lipstick, compact, comb, flat rounds of eye shadow and rouge, a half-empty package of cigarettes, a lighter, emery boards, a bottle of green nail polish, a pink ballpoint pen and a broken strand of pearl beads. I thrust a notepad and a charge-a-plate into my skirt pocket, closed the purse, wiped it carefully, put it back with the clothes, replaced the game box, plunked down the door, heaved the cushion onto the windowseat and heard the door at the bottom of the stairs being opened. Then quiet footfalls were assending the uncarpeted stairs.

I took one quick look around, then leaped like Maria Tallchief to the storage cupboard. The door was unlocked and I sat down in the darkness on an old steamer trunk wondering if who was out there could hear my heart. I could: it was like the devil's bass drum on doomsday. Above its booming tom-tom beat I heard a cushion plop to the floor, a hinged door lifted, a scrabbling in the depths of the windowseat. Then the door was dropped, the cushion replaced. I heard footsteps cross the room and listened as they descended the attic stairs.

I couldn't see my watch, so I counted slowly to a hundred and twenty. Two minutes. I counted again to sixty, then peered out. There was no one. Once more I removed the cushion on the windowseat, opened the door and looked. The clothes and the purse were gone.

5

TUESDAY NIGHT

I FOUND Maud alone in the kitchen preparing the evening meal for herself and Bertha, the laundress, Fedder's wife.

"Maud," I said, "Mrs. Orre would be embarrassed if I offered, but I'd be perfectly willing to be put on the staff, take over maid duties tomorrow—dusting, baths, beds—that is, if the agency can't replace—what were their names?"

"No-good names," Maud said.

"Didn't I hear someone mention the name Getzler?"

"Maybe. That could have been one of Marie's last names. She's had three husbands and she don't know what her name is herself."

"Did she come from the Bronx?"

"Where's that?"

"New York."

"Somewhere around there. Good riddance to her. Marie was a trouble-maker. Her and that Fedder! Many's the time I've known they were up in the attic, her pretending on her evenings out that she was going off somewhere, then sneaking upstairs. I never told Bertha. Poor woman! Don't you worry about helping, Virginia Crane. Have yourself a nice time and we'll get along. Bertha's as good in the house as she is over the ironing board and we can always send the laundry out."

I left her stuffing a fish and went to the terrace. It was all mine—all the gleaming red bricks, all the potted red geraniums marching on a low wall that curved at the

garden end around a miniature pool where water lilies floated and black goldfish with lace tails swiveled in their languorous, continuous underwater ballet. I selected a chaise and stretched out, admiring my bronze-gold pumps, which complemented my bronze-gold drip-dry.

So the treasures I had snitched from the gaudy lucite purse belonged to Marie, either forgotten in her haste at leaving Arrowhead Hill, or left purposely for fear of having her clandestine affair with Fedder discovered. Marie was Mrs. Albert Getzler, address, the Bronx. That was the name on the charge-a-plate. But if the clothes I had seen were Marie's, had she left the attic in the nude? I decided she must have kept a uniform in the trysting place, would enter the attic dressed for the street and would stay there until the next morning, when she would leave, uniformed and ready for work with no one, except Maud, the wiser. The murder, then, had been nothing more than a deadly mishap to an unknown, imprudent playgirl who had chosen the wrong playmate, who, no doubt, had incinerated her clothes by now. The apparel I had seen in the window-seat had belonged not to the dead girl but to Marie and it had been she—or Fedder—who had stolen up to the attic to retrieve them.

If I could reconcile my mind to Crandall's odd behavior, Polly's reticence, Mrs. Orre's personality change and Red's wild theory that the Sextons were involved with pickpockets I could relax. Was each of these things isolated, unrelated to the others, or were they all knots on the same string? But what about the poison ivy? Crandall, Pat—oh, yes, and Fedder! But Janet Orre had said poison ivy was everywhere, so none of them necessarily had to have been behind the boathouse. And I saw now that I couldn't dismiss the murder from my mind, dissociate it from Arrowhead Hill, simply because the clothes I had found were Marie's. Relax, indeed. And offer to help Maud tidy the house, indeed. It would have been better to tidy my own mind.

My thoughts were interrupted by Steve and Crandall

as they joined me on the terrace and sat down to wait for the rest of the household to congregate.

"Tell me about the aunties," I said. "Isn't that where we're going for dinner?"

"The aunties don't exist," Steve said, "except in your imagination. After you've seen them you don't believe them."

"They are unusual," Cran admitted, "and are actually our great-aunts—Grandfather Sexton's older sisters. Spinster twins and ninety last March. Aunt Gwen is a symphony addict and has had the same box at Music Hall since she could see over the rail. Aunt Eva is tone deaf and stalks birds. She's setting up a wild-bird sanctuary—keeps urging Mother to sell her the lake and part of the back property."

"And," Steve interrupted, "they're German—Cincinnati Dutch. Their mother's name was Austerheidi and they'll stuff you like a goose."

While I listened to more lore I watched Cran shift his chair from one position to another, chain-smoke and cross and recross his legs until I wanted to play rodeo cowboy after roping a calf and tie them together.

We arrived at the aunties' in two cars, Fedder driving Norman and Mrs. Orre, Crandall chauffering the rest of us. The house was a monstrous pile of stone off Grandin Road offering, from a balustered porch, a magnificent view of the Ohio River and the Kentucky hills beyond. The interior of the house was as ponderous. It was heavily beamed and French brocade fought a battle of color with Chinese silk screens and priceless Persian rugs. There was a Rockwood tile hearth above which hung a Duveneck in somber green and ocher. A three-foot brass warrior, atop a carved teak table, stood guard at the drawing-room door, as if assuring a guest security and complete protection from intrepid party crashers.

Aunt Gwen and Aunt Eva had been mistresses of their gigantic and hideous extravaganza for over sixty years, but in their eyes it was beautiful and in my eyes they were beautiful. Both of them, square as blocks, though seamed and bent with age, were as avidly alive as ten-

year-olds and when Aunt Eva introduced their house guest she bubbled with pleasure. I clutched onto my aplomb and greeted Felix Ponell. We both nodded and smiled in acknowledgment of the introduction.

During cocktails I overheard Felix apologizing to Polly for being an intruder at a family dinner on such an occasion as this and hear Polly ask him to attend the wedding with his hostesses, an invitation he accepted graciously. He was anxious to see Arrowhead Hill, he said, as it was a spot, so her Aunt Eva had assured him, that would make an ideal wild-bird sanctuary.

"Then you are the man Aunt Eva has been so enthusiastic about," Polly said. "The one who will set up her sanctuary."

"Yes," he answered, "as soon as she is able to purchase suitable land. Do you think your mother will part with the tract Miss Sexton wants?"

I didn't hear the answer, for we were summoned to dinner. Steve was right. We were stuffed like geese, then retired to the porch for coffee and brandy. Uncomfortably tight around the middle, I found that sitting gracefully was almost impossible, so, cradling the crystal snifter, I wandered to one end of the porch, leaned against the stone rail and watched the late June sunset glow fade from the river. Felix joined me.

"I told you it was beautiful," he said. I nodded in agreement and we both stood quietly for some moments looking at the view. He broke the silence, speaking in a muted voice.

"That was a rather unpleasant experience for all of you at Arrowhead Hill this morning."

No one had mentioned the murder, not the Orres, the young people or the aunties, and I wondered why Felix was bringing up the matter.

"Unfortunate for it to occcur practically on the eve of Polly's wedding," I said. "It lends a macabre note to the gaiety."

He said, "Understandable," paused for a moment, then continued. "You know my identity, don't you, Miss Crane?"

"Yes," I answered.

"I was sure you did when you attempted to talk of pickpockets. You've either seen me or heard me described. I must say that was an admirable lie about your father. Even if you don't have quick hands you have a quick mind—take care that it doesn't get you into trouble."

"How did you know who I was?" I asked.

"You live in the city where I had my only arrest. I have avoided that city, except to change planes there yesterday, but I have read its newspapers, ever since my unhappy experience, whenever I can find them on a newsstand, and you are not inactive socially. There's a young writer on the *Star* who has a remarkable gift for incisive reporting—enjoy reading him, especially. Mulvaney. I believe you have been seen with him at affairs."

"I believe so," I said.

He drummed his fingers on the stone rail, then pulled thoughtfully on his beard.

"Miss Crane, will you do a favor for me?"

"I can't promise unless I know what it is."

"It will be a favor for you, too. Keep your knowledge about me a secret. I needn't tell you that revealing what you know would put me in an embarrassing position, but it might put you in an even more embarrassing one. Perhaps even a dangerous one if some others discover that you know who I am."

"Who are 'some others'?"

"Others who know about my ex-profession."

"Ex?" I asked.

"Ex," he said. "One arrest for a man as conspicuous as I is one arrest too many. My retirement is due to a serious illness which has impaired my dexterity and my avocation is now my vocation. I should like to make a living at it, and I should also like to contribute whatever I can to help you live to a ripe old age. Please, Miss Crane, don't smile. I am not being dramatic. This morning's tragedy must not be repeated."

"What has this morning's tragedy got to do with you?" I asked bluntly.

"Perhaps nothing. And yet— Something I learned this evening— I can't tell you; all I can do is warn you. Be careful, extremely careful, my dear, and control that tongue of yours."

For years I had suffered the odium of having Red tell me to keep my mouth shut. Now a pickpocket was telling me the same thing, though in much more refined language.

"Strange, strange, fate," Felix said, looking at me curiously, "that you know about me and I know about you and our paths meet here as though we had both been led by the hand. And the others." His quiet voice lowered to a barely audible murmur. " 'Little folks become their little fate.' " Then Steve strolled our way and the conversation ended.

As we drove through the soft night to Arrowhead Hill, Polly and Crandall, their troubles evidently soothed for the time by the warmth of the family dinner, joined Steve in regaling Pat and me with hilarious tales of the aunties. What a rich inheritance the Sextons had, I thought, almost enviously, to be related to the two charming and lovable eccentrics. Then I wondered what Aunt Eva would say if she knew her bird man had been a pickpocket. I was sure she would consider it out of the ordinary but none of her business. And was it the fate Felix had mentioned that was keeping my wagging tongue still about him, or had I subconsciously been following Red's admonition all along to avoid mentioning anything unusual? My meeting with Felix on the plane would have made a delightful traveling story to tell Pat and Polly as they drove me from the airport and yet I had not mentioned the man. Why? Fate? Was Red right? Had Whitney Sexton been the top brass of the pickpockets? A multimillionaire by inheritance, why would he have involved himself with something shady? Excitement? Had his wife been part of it? I hadn't noticed any unusual reaction on her part when she was

introduced to Felix and in her state of twitching nervousness she certainly would have dropped her purse or lost her voice. She hadn't done either. Though Felix had given up his profession as a lifter, was he managing director now? And the murder. Did it really involve anyone at Arrowhead Hill? Felix thought it might and I heard his murmured words again: "This morning's tragedy must not be repeated." I agreed. There was nothing appealing about thinking of oneself as a deceased nude in a patch of poison ivy. And I might have been wrong about the clothes in the attic. Had they been Marie's or hadn't they? Was her name Getzler or wasn't it? If I could only talk to Red! But where could I find a telephone with no extension and no eavesdroppers?

Steve and I were the only ones who hadn't yawned and gone to bed. I had welcomed his invitation to a game of Scrabble, grateful for a reprieve from confusing thoughts, and he was digging in his pocket for thirty-two cents when Fedder called me to the phone. He explained that he had not yet locked the library, so I could take the call there. With its treasure-laden, white-draped tables the room was an eerie place and the parchment-shaded dictionary lamp, the only light burning, made it even eerier.

"Gin," Red said, "I got your letter. Did you get mine?"

"Yes, darling," I burbled, "it came about noon. You're so thoughtful, sweetheart. I've been wanting to call and thank you."

"For what?" The unaccustomed endearments had him on guard.

"For taking Ruffles to the vet," I said.

"Oh—that—"

"I told Mother before I left we should get him to the kennel—Ruffles' snuffling worried me."

"He snuffles, sure enough," Red said.

"I do miss that poodle's fuzzy white topknot and beard, so very like a sweet little man I met tonight at a Sexton family dinner. A bird fancier. He's staying with

Polly's aunts—he's going to set up a bird sanctuary for one of them."

There, I had told Red that Felix was in town acquainted with at least part of the Sexton family.

"The vet says Ruffles has worms," Red said, picking up the ball and running with it. I have had rabbits, mice, cats, turtles and hamsters but never owned a dog."

"How did he get worms?" I asked.

"Scavenging," Red said. "Where do most pampered dogs get worms?"

"Of course. He probably found a dead something behind the garage."

"It was dead all right. A hairless rat."

"Ugh," I shuddered. "But how do you know?"

"The A.P., Gin. I'm a newspaperman—remember? And they love your mother—will put anything on the wire, even dead-rat information, so I go and investigate."

Ah, now we were both warming to the double talk. He knew I had met Felix again and where and I knew he had read the Associated Press release about the murder and presumed that "skinless dead rat" had been a reference to the clothesless dead woman. Now, if the clothes I had found did not belong to the maid; if they belonged to the dead woman— But how could I tell him about the discovery? The silence must have been long.

"Are you there, Gin?"

"Yes, dear. Something's been bothering me and it's just occurred to me what it was. Give Mother a message. There are some clothes in the attic. Tell her to give them to Tamara."

We have no attic and Tamara was Red's imaginary witch who had lived in his head until the age of nine, when reality finally caught up with him.

"Tamara?"

"Yes—you know Tamara."

"Oh—you mean Tamara."

"Yes, Tamara. And she's going—" Where was she going? And who was she? A friend, the cleaning woman, the little girl next door? Was she going to market, going

abroad; did she need the clothes as a costume for an amateur play?

"Where's Tamara going?" Red asked patiently.

"To a policeman's ball," I said, suddenly inspired. "Tomorrow night, and I promised to give her the clothes and forgot in the excitement of leaving."

"Where did you say they were?"

"In the attic."

There was an extended pause and, long distance, I could see Red taking notes that, when deciphered, would inform him, I hoped, that I had found clothes in the Sexton attic.

"It's about time Tamara had some fun," he said. "But why don't I get the clothes from your mother, give them to the policemen and let them have a strip tease in reverse for Tamara. They'd really have a ball."

I glowed with appreciation for Red's ability to decipher spontaneous code. He had got my message. Did I get his? Did he want me to give the clothes to the police? How could I tell him they were gone?

"No—you can't do that," I said slowly, stalling for time to think. "It wouldn't be exactly fair to Tamara. She may be a witch, darling, but she's not immoral or even immodest. Besides, the clothes are gossamer."

"Spell it," Red said.

I spelled it, then explained it. "Gossamer means dainty, wispy, cobwebby—you know, sort of not there. Fairy clothes. I always felt as though those in the attic didn't belong to me and knew they would disintegrate if touched by the hands of an unbeliever. I've never met a policeman at a ball, or directing traffic, who believed in fairies. They're such realists."

Would that do it? Did Red know what I had meant—that I had found the clothes but that they had disappeared? That I couldn't possibly turn them over to the authorities? Now the charge-a-plate— How could I talk about that without saying the silly word?

"Is that all of the message for your mother?" he asked.

"Not quite. There's a purse with the clothes. Tell

Mother to look through it. I always forget to empty purses and my old charge-a-plate may be there. Ive a new one, but I don't want anyone running up bills in my name. Even Tamara, much as I love her."

"Charge-a-plate?"

"You know what a charge-a-plate is," I said.

"Sorry. Never heard of one."

"It's a little—oh, thing. A little piece of metal with your name and address on it and you just hand it to a clerk in a store and can buy anything you like without paying."

"That's for me," Red said. "How do I get one?"

"You don't. First your credit has to be good."

"I'm beginning to understand. I can't get one, but you have two of them. And you don't want the old one to fall into the hands of some unscrupulous person who might run up bills in your name."

"How bright you are. Exactly. But even I can't charge things in Cincinnati with the one I have. It's only good in the stores at home. I might as well be dead." I emphasized the last word and hoped he would understand that the charge-a-plate belonged to the dead woman?

"Then it's fortunate you aren't home. You can't run up your own bills," he said, and I knew he wanted to keep our conversation going.

"No. You know, honey, I'm so extravagant I think I'll give up my charges, but what should I do with the charge-a-plate? It won't burn. If I throw it away someone may find it and use it. Should I give it back to a store, bury it—hand it over to the police?"

I scowled at a three-branched candelabra and wondered if anyone who might be listening in on an extension would eye me askance the next morning.

"Don't be hasty," Red said, after another long pause. "I can't get a charge-a-plate, because I have no credit, but if you give yours up your credit rating goes down. The minute you pay cash for anything you have no credit rating. We'll talk this over later."

"When?" I asked.

"The next time I see you."

"I can't wait till then."

"Don't be so eager," Red said. "It's not becoming. Are you having a good time?"

"Lovely," I snarled sweetly, wishing I could twist his nose. "Except for an unfortunate death of an unidentified woman behind the boathouse this morning. I understand the secluded place where she was killed is a rendezvous for all sorts of undesirable characters. But poor Mrs. Orre. Two maids left today because of it and she'll probably get something inept and awkward from the agency to replace them just when she needs the most experienced help. The place will start swarming with house guests tomorrow."

"Well—have fun," Red said. "I'll check on Ruffles, and listen, sweetheart, memorize those binding words the bride repeats. I don't want you making a fool of me at the altar, stumbling over the I-will's."

"Is that a proposal?" I asked.

"It's not the back of my hand," he said and hung up.

There were a quarter, a nickle and two pennies by the Scrabble board on the card table in the drawing room. I picked up my winnings and went upstairs, noting as I did that Fedder came from the back of the hall to lock doors and turn out lights.

In my room as I sat on the purple chair, kicked off my pumps and slowly stripped off stockings, I stared at the bathroom door as though it could answer my questions. Had Red understood what I had been trying to tell him and had I understood what he had tried to tell me? X + Y equals idiocy, I finally decided, and hurriedly finished undressing. I pulled up my pajama trousers, tied them, then tried to squirm into the tops. The right sleeve was pinned together and I almost severed a tendon between two fingers before I realized that a safety pin is stronger than tendons. There was something rustly inside the sleeve. I unsnapped the pin and watched a folded note float to the floor.

Dear Virginia:

I have given this to Maud and I'm relying on her to get it to you. I dismissed your query about Cran this morning, and rudely, so I apologize. I would like to talk to you about him. The police have been dragging the lake all afternoon trying to dredge up the dead woman's clothes, but they're through, as are the photographers, so there should be privacy there tomorrow. Try to come to the boat house in the morning. I'll be there between ten and twelve, or close by, so if you don't see me, whistle a merry tune of some kind. If you can't whistle, sing. I'll hear you.

Grey Faldman

I tore the note into confetti and flushed it down the toilet, switched out my lights, then heard a faint noise from the hall. A door closing? Footsteps? I listened, my ear plastered to the door. I still didn't know who occupied the rooms across from mine and next to mine. I did know it was neither Polly nor the Orres; their rooms were in the front of the main part of the house.

I turned the knob quietly and peered through a two-inch aperture. A figure with a bundle in one arm was at the top of the steps; the faint night lights did not glow but splayed only enough soft light from the baseboards to relieve total darkness and I could not recognize the figure, nor even its sex. It could have been a man or a woman in slacks.

I groped through the blackness of my room to the bed, found my robe and put it on and slipped silently into the hall. There I stood immobile. Another figure was at the top of the steps. A moment later the front door opened—closed.

I moved quickly to the stairs, descended them and went directly to the drawing room, where I wrapped all of myself except my head in a drape and looked through a window. The first figure was heading toward the garage, with the second one fifty feet behind. I unwrapped myself and dashed to a side window. The first figure was

taking the path to the lake, the second one was still fifty feet behind.

How kind the new moon was to shine just enough and not too much. I would be able to recognize them when they returned. I pulled a low upholstered chair to one of the front windows, arranged it behind a drape so that, from the hall, I couldn't be seen sitting there keeping my vigil. The first impulse to follow them had died aborning; I was barefoot, I might be seen and I might get locked out. This was much better—a snug, front-row seat.

I wakened with a jerk of my head as it started to fall off. What was I doing asleep in a chair? Where was I? Reaching out a hand, I felt the drape and remembered. What time was it? How long had I been there? Had the figures returned? I tiptoed to the handsome banjo clock hanging at one side of the hearth and tried to determine which was the minute hand, which the hour. It couldn't be fifteen minutes after nine, so it had to be fifteen minutes until three. When had I come downstairs? Not later than one-thirty.

Muttering inwardly for being such a fool, I headed for the stairs and was halfway up before I remembered the chair behind the drape. Someone might notice the ridiculous furniture arrangement, so back I went, restored the chair to its former location and once more started to my room. I froze three steps from the top as I heard the muted closing of a door, muted footsteps on the carpet. Clutching the banister, not only for physical but moral support, I watched Janet Orre turn the corner at the railing at the top of the stairs. She saw me.

"Oh," she said in a startled whisper. "Who is it?"

"Me," I said, trying to swallow a strange quiver that had crept into my voice. "Gin."

"Gin?"

"Yes." I went up the remaining steps. "I couldn't sleep and went to the kitchen for a glass of milk. I hope you don't feel I was overstepping the bounds of your hospitality."

"Not at all. I'm going to do the same."

"Can't you sleep either?"

"I was asleep, but as so often happens, I wakened after two hours and have counted as many sheep as I care to. I hope the milk sedative works for you."

"It usually does," I said. "Good-night. I hope it works for you too."

Our whispered conference was over and I went down the hall to my room as Janet Orre disappeared down the stairs. I kept the bedroom door slightly ajar and stood, listening. The front door opened and closed. Evidently Polly's mother was going next door to the Faldmans' to milk a cow.

6

WEDNESDAY MORNING

"YOU'RE very quiet this morning, Gin," Norman Orre said at breakfast. "Are our activities too strenuous for you?"

"Not at all," I replied. "It often takes an hour for me to become fully conscious."

"Then this is the time of day to play games. How about Scrabble?" Steve said. "Gin trounced me last night. Did you find your winnings?"

"Yes, thank you."

"So it was you two prowling around last night," Polly said.

"I never prowl," Steve said. "Grope, yes, stumble sometimes, lurch or stalk to bed, but I never prowl."

"You probably heard me," I said.

Pat halted a muffin in mid-air. "What were you doing up last night—"

"Please, Pat," Polly cut in, but I continued.

"I couldn't sleep," I said. "I hope I didn't rouse the entire household. Did you hear me?"

Pat didn't answer, but Cran did. "I not only heard you, I saw you from my bedroom window. Do you usually wander around outside when you can't sleep?"

Should I deny being out or let him, and the rest of them, think I had been? I wondered. If they, whoever the two I had seen from my window were, thought there was a possiblity I had seen them I would be in a rather awkward position. If Cran had seen his mother and mistaken her for me, was he trying to find out whether I had seen him? Had he seen a feminine figure from his

bedroom window as he had said, or had he been coming from the lake and seen it then? All this flashed through my mind as I swallowed a bite of bacon before speaking.

"Not usually," I said. "But after getting a glass of milk, the night was so beautiful I couldn't resist going out and drinking some of it in along with the milk. That's a sedative, too, being completely alone with a new moon. It makes you feel as though you own the universe." There, had I squirmed out of that one with my maudlin, poetic prose? Had I given the impression that I had seen no one—that I had been alone with the moon? I had not told Janet Orre I had not been outside, though the implication had been that I had gone no father than the kitchen. It was she who saved me now, changing the subject, and quickly, to itemize the activities for the day.

Crandall and Steve were driving to the airport to meet Steve's parents. Polly and Pat were to meet a later plane bringing Pat's New York friends. Norman was consulting with parking attendants and the Rangers about traffic and space for the guests' cars. Janet Orre would be occupied with a dozen duties, among them instructing new servants. Luncheon would be a buffet affair at two o'clock.

I declined invitations to go anywhere with anyone and a few minutes after ten walked the path to the lake. The tree was still in the water, yesterday's grisly discovery having precluded any activity on removing it. I didn't need to whistle a merry tune, because Grey Faldman was sitting on the boathouse steps. He rose as I approached, then sat down again as I sat beside him.

"Dependable Maud," he said. "You got my note. Does anyone know you're here?"

"Not a soul. They're all busy or gone to meet planes."

"Good. We shouldn't be interrupted. Yesterday you said Cran acted strange—you asked if there was something wrong with him. There is."

"There is?"

"A lot. Cran is a good friend of mine, Virginia."

"Gin," I said. "It's shorter and describes me better."

"All right, Gin. Because of his looks he is sensitive, almost antisocial, and often strikes out blindly—I don't know why. Frustration, possibly. I take his outbursts in stride and resent people who confuse the outer shell with the inner man. But Cran's in trouble."

"Yes?"

"Serious trouble. After the police questioned him yesterday he came down here, sat with me as we watched the dredging of the lake and told me an almost unbelievable story."

"Why you?" I asked.

"I told you I'm his friend, perhaps his only one. He can't talk to anyone else and yesterday he had to talk. He says he killed his father—says that his family know it."

"Cran? Cran killed his father!" I exclaimed. "How?"

"Pushed him from the hotel window."

"You told me yesterday that Cran was squeamish about baiting a fishhook. Is pushing someone from a window kinder than impaling a worm on a barb?"

"No," Grey said, "but that's why the story is believable, though unbelievable. Cran would never do a thing like that, but he says he doesn't remember doing it."

"Oh, amnesia."

"Not amnesia. Drunk. Cran drinks heavily—part of his escape mechanism, I suppose. He remembers stumbling into one of the bedrooms in the suite the Sextons were occupying the night his father died and remembers nothing more until the next morning. Two years later his mother and Norman Orre told him what had happened—that in a drunken frenzy he had pushed his father from the open window." Grey nervously untied and retied a shoestring. "He said he was drunk the night you arrived—Monday night. That he can't remember what he said, that Steve played wet nurse until Cran got rid of him by pretending to go to bed, and that he wakened on the terrace at four o'clock in the morning. Cran is afraid that without knowing it, he killed the woman we found."

"Impossible!" I said.

"Improbable is the word," Grey said. "Not impossible."

"What did he do with her clothes?"

"He doesn't know."

"But under hypnosis, he might remember?" I asked.

"Don't take this so lightly."

"I'm not taking it lightly. Perhaps he did kill the woman; perhaps he did kill his father, but why would his mother wait two years to tell him? And why tell him at all after that length of time?"

"I don't know. Remember, I told you she was born mean."

"No mother is that mean."

"That's right. Stand up for God, country and motherhood," Grey said. "But the murders aren't all that are bothering Cran. He's discovered that Polly has already made a settlement on Patrick Wiere and that he gets all of her estate if she dies."

"Is that unusual?" I asked. "Don't lots of people do that?"

"It's unusual before the wedding."

"Does Mrs. Orre, Norman, either of them know about it?"

"Cran thinks Norman Orre arranged it. Cran hates him."

"Norman Orre is charming," I said, "a delightful person. And if he were doing the arranging I'd think he would have insisted that Polly leave her money to her mother. That might eventually benefit him more. You know what I think?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"I think Cran dislikes Norman because he took his father's place. I think Cran is jealous of anyone personable and likable."

"I'm disappointed, Gin. You're like all the rest. Cran looks like a caricature, so you put him in a comic book. Not a book of comedy, you understand, but one of those unfunny strips that the morons chortle over with sadistic glee."

"I'm sorry," I said, and was. "I don't mean to be

cruel. It is so preposterous and Crandall sounds, and acts, uncanny. His dislike of Norman Orre was probably behind the reference the other night to Norman's selling the bride instead of giving her away."

"He said that? What did Norman do?"

"Nothing. He was a gentleman, but Cran's mother was terribly upset. After he had left the room she asked us to forgive him and Polly said, 'We do, dear. We always have.' Now I'm beginning to understand other things—what Polly meant when she said to me, 'When this is all over—if it ever is.' All of them know that Crandall killed his father. They're protecting him and living with the knowledge every day. How unutterably dreadful! No wonder Mrs. Orre has changed."

"It's a mucky business," Grey said, staring across the lake. "And Gin, yesterday morning I confessed to you that I love Polly but hadn't the nerve to ask her to marry me. Next fall I'll be a forester in an isolated wilderness and I couldn't ask her to share a lonely, wilderness existence. I want Polly to be happy and I don't want Cran to ruin that happiness. You may be able to prevent him from doing just that. Let Polly have her wedding day. If Cran is guilty, Friday is soon enough for him to confess. You're up there at the house; you'll be close by and able to interrupt him, shut him up if he starts to make a scene. Will you do that?"

"Then you think his concern about Polly is ungrounded, that is, concerning her settlement on Pat? And the idea that Norman Orre is part of some mercenary conspiracy?"

"Yes. I don't like admitting it, but I know Cran and I think the burden he's carrying can make him imagine anything."

I stood up and stretched, left Grey on the steps and wandered across the coarse sand to the fallen tree, climbed on it and walked its length, mulling over what Grey had said and what I knew. Crandall had killed, by his own admission once, and perhaps twice. It was he who had been out last night, after all. Someone had heard him and followed, and Janet Orre had followed

both of them. That was that. Felix Ponell and pickpockets were extraneous, really played no part in the Arrowhead Hill tragedy. I would tell Red so when I talked with him again. Yet why had Felix warned me about revealing his identity? I felt Grey's hands on my shoulder.

"Can you swim?" he asked.

"I missed the Olympic trials by two seconds," I said, waiting for him to push me in, jump in after me and hold me under.

"Good. You seem to be attracted by the end of this tree and I wouldn't want you to have an accident."

"Neither would I."

"Hey—what is that?" His strong fingers relinquished their grip as he pointed. I peered into the water. Something white, caught on one of the old maple's branches, trailed in sinuous undulation a foot or so beneath the surface. It took me a moment to identify it.

"In our grandmothers' day it was unmentionable," I said, "but I call it a brassiere."

Grey fished it out with a pointed stick. It was a Maidenform, size 38.

"What will you do with it?" I asked, looking at the dripping white cloth on the end of the stick.

"Why didn't the police find this yesterday?" he muttered, not answering me.

"Maybe it wasn't here yesterday," I said. "Maybe Crandall came to and remembered where he had hidden the clothes. Perhaps he threw them in here last night. Will you give it to the police?"

Grey answered me by snatching the brassiere from the stick point, hurling the stick away, running back the length of the tree trunk, jumping off, tying scooped up stones into the skimpy garment and hurling the wad as far as he could into the lake.

"You shouldn't have done that," I admonished him, walking the trunk to the shore. I slid off and stood beside him.

"No," he said, "I shouldn't. But I'll find it. In a day or two I'll put on my skin-diver suit and retrieve it, give

it to the police and help send my best friend to the gallows. Cherrio, Cran! Better life on the next planet, old boy! And you." He faced me, his eyes blazing. "If you tell anyone—anyone—"

"You'll kill me, too?" I asked softly.

Grey walked away, stood where the water lapped at his feet, then walked back to me.

"I didn't kill her, Gin."

"How do I know?"

"You don't."

"You could have," I said. "You could have killed her and used me—put on an innocent act. You, Grey Faldman and I, Virginia Crane, found a dead woman. You could have hidden her clothes in the woods—practically anywhere—waited until the police dredged the lake, then tossed them in. I don't know you, Grey Faldman. You could be one of those scrubbed, clean-cut kids you see on the front page, the ones who say in their statements 'I love people. I didn't want to kill anyone, but Grandma wouldn't let me watch Alfred Hitchcock. And what could I do but kill Grandma? I don't know what made me do it—I just happened to have a gun and it was loaded and all of a sudden it went off. Blood really makes me sick.' Blood makes me sick, too, Grey."

"Why are you here then?" Grey asked. "If you think I might be one of that breed. Aren't you afraid?"

"Not at all." I wouldn't admit that I had been for one panicky moment as he had put his hands on my shoulders. "I would be missed within an hour. It would be much too involved and messy for you, or anyone, to dispose of me at this time of day or on this particular day. I'm not frightened." And I wasn't, not then.

Grey chuckled, then went into gale after gale of uncontrolled laughter until he had to lean against the dirty, gnarled root-end of the fallen tree. He finally wiped his streaming eyes with a khaki-covered upper arm.

"No wonder Polly adores you," he said. "Do you always have your feet so flat on the ground?"

"No, not always. But I don't keep my head in the clouds and there's something dreadfully wrong around

here. I listened to your tale about Crandall and I'm not too sure you didn't make it all up."

"I didn't make it up," he said, "and there is something dreadfully wrong. But let's be friends, Gin. I didn't kill that woman. Believe me, I didn't. I kill heifers and young bulls, pigs and fowl when they're ready for market. I kill varmints when they eat the crops and I kill insects when they eat me, but I could never kill another human being. Never. And neither could Cran if he knew what he was doing."

"Why didn't the police search at Arrowhead Hill, or your house, for the clothes?" I asked. "Why just search the woods—drag the lake?"

"They don't know what they're looking for. Evening clothes, jodhpurs, shorts, dress? A clever murderer could have an accomplice, or some woman or girl who cares about him could distribute the clothes among her own possessions. How could the police distinguish them from anything else in a female's closet? But if clothes were found in the lake, in the fields or woods, they would probably belong to the dead girl."

A clever killer might do what Grey suggested, but was Cran clever? Not according to Grey's tale about him. He wasn't only not clever, he didn't know what he was doing. And if he didn't know, how could he have an accomplice?

"None of it makes sense," I said. "It's all preposterous."

"Murder *is* preposterous," said Grey.

I walked slowly back to the house, reluctant to start playing arbiter or whatever I might be labeled. How could I keep Crandall quiet if he wanted to talk? And was it my business? If the Sextons and the Orres got themselves into a mess, who was I to go pull them out of it? If Crandall suffered, I could sympathize, but I couldn't undo what he had done, nor could I keep him from doing something worse.

Through the woods, through the swathe-cut path, onto the gravel, I proceeded, thinking of the unhappy

people in the big house, when I saw a little white button winking up at me. It was a pearl shirt button, the identical mate of millions of white buttons. I picked it up and rolled it between my thumb and forefinger, started to toss it away, then reconsidered. It looked like the mate of millions, but even shirt buttons are not all identical. The better the quality of the shirt, the better the quality of the button. And there are minute differences between buttons of the same quality. Some have four holes, some two; some are flat and thin or flat and thicker. Some are rounded and chubby. Some are opaque, some are almost translucent. The one I held was flat, of medium thickness, and it had two holes.

It had to have been dropped recently or it wouldn't have been sitting so jauntily atop a flat rock no bigger than a quarter; it would have been kicked and scuffed into the gravel.

All the men had worn white shirts the night before. During my apprenticeship at Loman and Lee's I had clerked in every department and had learned in Men's Haberdashery that most men, when they found a shirt whose cut, collar and material suited them, bought three or half-a-dozen of the same kind. Perhaps the man who had worn the shirt from which this button came had others just like it. Perhaps I would see it on him. Perhaps, then, I might know who had come down this path last night. Then what? What would I know? Nothing more. I knew it was Crandall and what difference did it make who had followed him? It would have been someone who was fond of him and was trying to protect him. I put the button in my pocket.

When I reached the house the parking attendants were leaving and Norman was standing in the driveway watching them go.

"It's a simple mathematical problem," he remarked as I approached him. "So many square feet for each car, so much clearance to put each in place. The lane is wide enough for parking on one side, so we won't have to use the shoulders on Falman Road."

"So you've solved your problem for the day," I said. "How about Mrs. Orre? Does she need help?"

"Fortunately, no. The agency called. They're sending two people out before lunch. There'll be thirteen of us. I hope you aren't superstitious."

"No," I assured him and we parted, he to go into the house and I to wander around outside it. I had not yet strolled across the broad lawns or looked at the gardens. Squatting, busy men were scattered through the perennial borders. I stopped beside one who was staking delphiniums and remarked on their beauty.

"Prettiest flower there is," the gardener replied, "except for roses, tulips, daffodils, anemones—"

"Begonias, petunias, snapdragons," I carried on.

We grinned at each other.

"Even sumac is pretty," he said. "It's too bad some of the varieties are poisonous to some people."

"Is poison ivy pretty?" I asked.

"It's as pretty as any ivy that grows. Prettier than some, and you know, when I dig it out I feel sort of sad. It's not its fault that it's so worrisome."

"There's a lot of it around here, isn't there?"

"Nope. We've got rid of it. Oh—there's always some on the road shoulders and the fields, but that's not where we work. Our nursery has been taking care of Arrowhead Hill since it was laid out and I know every square inch of it—that is, the lawns and the gardens. No poison ivy here."

He went back to staking and I went back to strolling. No poison ivy except on the road shoulders or in the fields. Well, well. Fedder and Crandall could possibly have business on the road shoulders or in a field, but what about Pat? But why delve into poison ivy now? I thought. Crandall was guilty, he has admitted it and probably every one knows it but the police. I was suddenly tired, exhausted and completely fed up with other people's troubles, so I smelled a couple of lemon lilies, patted some daisy petals and went to my room.

I took the button with the charge-a-plate and the note book, wrapped them in facial tissue and locked them all

in my jewel case, feeling like a comic-opera buffoon. Then I partially undressed, put on a robe and lay on the bed.

There was a knock on my door. I rolled over and looked at the clock. It couldn't be one o'clock! But it was. I had slept an hour and a half. The knock was repeated and I called out in answer.

"Miss Crane, I'm the new pantry boy. Every one is on the terrace and I've been instructed to tell you that sherry is being served."

"Red Mulvaney," I gasped. "I could kiss you!"

"Why don't you?" Red replied through the door.

7

WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON

"CLOSE the door and sit down," I said a minute later.

"And have someone see me coming out of Miss Crane's room!" Red patted the top of my head. "Think with this."

"You said they were all downstairs."

"They aren't chained. Someone could come up for a clean handkerchief."

"Where is your room?"

"Over the garage with Fedder and his wife and the new maid."

"Oh?"

"Don't worry. I heard her life history on the way out in the taxi. She's fifty-three and has seven grandchildren."

"Boys or girls?"

"Some of each. And they say the cutest things—let me tell you."

"Let me guess," I said.

"No, you can read them in tomorrow morning's 'Folksy' column." He scratched the side of his nose, a most irritating habit. "You can't come to the garage. I can't come here. Where can I talk to you?"

"I don't know. You're much too necessary to go wandering off into the wilderness, and the maid of honor can't have a huddle in a corner with the pantry boy."

"No, your exalted position makes it undignified for you to be chummy with the scullery." He patted my head again. "You'll think of somewhere absurd. Now,

get dressed and join the bacchanal on the patio. There are two pretty boys down there with broad a's and cashmere jackets the color of false teeth."

"Champagne," I informed him.

"All right, champagne," he said, stepping to the door. "Slosh on some of that new perfume you were telling me about—you know, the kind that makes you smell like you. I'll sweep the boys out after lunch."

I slammed the door, zipped into my clothes, repaired my face and hair, and by the time I had finished, had thought of a meeting place. I scribbled a hasty note: *Maud is dependable. Tell her anything—that you're my old roller-skating partner or a hill-billy cousin. Ask her to let us meet in her room. It's off the kitchen and no one ever goes there.*

I folded the note into a two-inch square, slipped it into my dress pocket and went downstairs.

After many noddings and how-do-you-do's, introductions were finally over and Pat, Polly, the pretty boy whose name was Tod and I made a cozy foursome at one of the terrace tables.

"Sherry?"

"Yes, please," I said to the pantry boy. Red lowered the tray and I helped myself to a glass of sherry and a cocktail napkin.

"Will that be gone by tomorrow?" Tod said, wrinkling his nose in disgust and pointing a finger at Pat's lotion-covered hands.

"I hope so," Pat said. "Not exactly the sort of companion you want on a honeymoon. But I don't know how long it lasts."

"It depends on how severe a case you have," I said. "You seem to have it under control."

"I can't imagine where you got it, Pat," Polly remarked. "We haven't picnicked or walked on the bridle path. You and Cran! The groom and one of the ushers. What a beautiful wedding—all lathered with poison-ivy lotion."

"Steve and I were practicing chip shots. Remember, Polly? Monday morning. I chipped a lot into one of the

flower borders—that's probably where I got it. Your mother said this morning it's everywhere."

"If mother says so, it's so," Polly said. "And I'd forgotten about your practice. I meant to tell you and Steve to replace the turf. Mother has fits if we leave holes in the lawn."

"We didn't do much digging," Pat assured her. "And we were very careful when we did."

Tod changed the subject and took us to Broadway. While listening with appreciative wonder to his adjective-embroidered story about some chorus boys who lost their leotards and found them in the girl's lockers, I watched the pantry boy out of a corner of an eye. Adversity has its rewards. Four years of serving tables in a fraternity house had left Red an accomplished waiter and the years of reporting had instilled in him a receptiveness to peoples' moods. An Adolph or Gustav at the Waldorf could not have been more obsequious or adept.

A pleasant sherry glow permeated the terrace when luncheon was announced, so I glowed pleasantly as I smiled and handed Red a crumpled napkin instead of putting it on the tray. He didn't glow back but did palm the napkin deftly, then, just as deftly, transferred it to his hip pocket.

We served ourselves at a long table that had been set up close by the door that led to the pantry. I ecstatically devoured two helpings of lobster Newburg and Caesar salad, then purred as I dipped strawberries in powdered sugar, popped them into my mouth and, being meticulous and tidy, made symmetrical patterns on the dessert plate with the green stems. I hoped the kitchen help had the same menu and knew that if they didn't, Maud would succumb to Red's charm and let him scrape the chafing dish.

As he and the grandmother-maid cleared the dessert plates Red managed to be at our table. He slid an awkward thumb onto my plate and separated four green strawberry stems from the rest.

"Four o'clock," I murmured.

Red caught my eye and nodded.

"It can't be four o'clock," Tod said.

"No, of course not," said I. "Someday I'm going to buy a watch that has numbers I can see without a magnifying glass."

We then discussed magnifying glasses, a topic that led naturally to lenses. Lenses led to cameras. Cameras led to movies and movies brought us back to Broadway and Tod talked. And talked.

Some time later, I met Polly on the stairs. "Gin darling, come on up to the room with me." She looked at her watch. "It isn't four yet and the rehearsal isn't until six. I have to get away from this confusion. I'd forgotten how much noise a houseful of people can make just talking quietly."

"Why don't you nap? I did before lunch and it helps. I was on my way to catch Maud, to ask her what brand of ambrosia she put in the Newburg. Mother collects recipes and I collect appetites, so I collaborate with her. You don't mind?"

"Not at all, but Maud may be napping, too, so knock loudly on her door. Do you know where her room is?"

"Off the kitchen?"

"Yes, the door on the right across the room as you face it from the pantry."

"I'll look in on you when I come back."

"Do. I'd like to talk to you."

Maud was sitting at the big, round servants' dining table in the kitchen alcove reading the morning funnies.

"Your stepbrother is waiting for you," she said. "Cicero. Never heard such a name."

"His mother was a Latin scholar," I said.

"He don't resemble you much."

"His mother had red hair."

"His mother should have taught him something besides pantry work. If he's not your step-brother, Virginia Crane, you think twice before you marry him. You'll starve to death."

How true, I thought. Not because Cicero didn't have

an adequate salary, but because it flowed in a steady stream from his pockets into bistros, bookshops and bowling alleys.

"I'll warn the girl he marries," I said. "And thank you, Maud. Thank you, too, for pinning Grey's note in my pajamas."

"You're welcome. That boy's eating his heart out over Polly and if he's getting interested in a nice girl like you I'll do anything I can to help him."

Maud went back to the funnies and I went into her room. Red was snoring in a lounge chair. I shook him and sat down on the edge of Maud's bed, facing him.

"Don't look so downcast," he said. "Lieutenant Haggart sent you his regards. After I relayed your conversation last night he's offering you a job as a cryptographer."

"I'll consider it," I said. "Now, give—how did you get here?"

"Simple. You said the maids had left and an agency had been called to fill the vacancies. I had a personal conference with Haggart; he had a long-distance one with the Cincinnati police and the F.B.I.; both Haggart and I had one with my boss, who, with tears in his eyes, kissed me on both cheeks and told me to get a good story. I caught a four A.M. plane and here I am."

"You're a most amazing fellow," I said with awe.

"Certainly," he said complacently.

"Did you figure out what I was trying to tell you last night?"

"I think so. Felix Ponell is at the home of Polly's aunts, here to set up a wild-bird sanctuary. You found some clothes in the attic that might belong to the murdered woman. Haggart helped me decipher the gossamer allusion, that you had found them and then they disappeared?"

"You're both so clever. That's right."

"And you have a charge-a-plate, taken from the purse that was with the clothes?"

"I have." I gave him the little tissue-wrapped bundle. "There's nothing in the notebook but a shopping list, though the handwriting may help."

He examined the charge-a-plate and flipped through the notebook. "What's the button?"

"I'll tell you later. It's part of a story."

"What do you know that you couldn't tell me on the phone and what have you discovered since last night?"

I told him how I had found the clothes and my thought, after talking to Maud, that they might belong to a maid who was having an affair with Fedder and not the murdered woman. But before I went into involved explanations, I said proudly, "I know who killed Whitney Sexton and who killed the woman behind the boathouse."

"My, my! Who?"

"Crandall Sexton."

Red listened intently as I related Crandall's confession to Grey Faldman.

"And that's where the button comes in," I explained. "I found it on the way back from the lake this morning. It was sitting there on the path asking to be picked up, so it must have come from a shirt worn by one of the figures I saw last night. Cran's, probably."

"Figures? Last night?"

"Yes. I followed them as far as the drawing room, then went to sleep, then—"

"Gin!" Red exploded.

"Well, I heard something as I was going to bed, so I looked out into the hall and there was a figure with a bundle, and then someone else. So I followed them. What would you have done?"

"Followed them," Red said, "but why do you do such senseless things? Someone is going to bop you on the head someday. All right, what's the rest of the story?"

"I decided that the bundle was the clothes that had been taken from the windowseat, that the figure was going to dispose of them, that if I could recognize whoever it was I'd know who killed the woman. After talking to Grey, I'm sure it was Cran. Maybe Steve was the second figure, maybe Norman Orre, and I know Mrs. Orre went out to investigate, because I talked to her and heard her leave the house."

Red made me go back over each detail of the fruitless night watch. He listened without speaking, scowling thoughtfully and cracking his knuckles.

"But, Red," I appended, "there are still things that bother me. Cran has poison ivy and the woman was lying in a puddle of it. But then Fedder has it and so does Pat. Pat said at lunch he probably got it while practicing chip shots on the lawn, retrieving the ball from the flower borders. But the gardener says there is no poison ivy on the lawns or in the flower gardens."

"The gardener?"

"Yes. I talked to him this morning."

"You do get around. What did the barber's apprentice have to say?"

"He said you need a haircut."

"So I do, but it will have to wait. What else do you know?"

"I know where the clothes are. Crandall threw them in the lake, but Grey isn't going to tell the police until after the wedding. He doesn't want Polly's day ruined."

"Tell me more about this Grey Faldman."

I told him more. Everything I knew. I went over the conversations I had had with him, described his behavior when we found the dead woman, told how he had thrown the brassiere in the lake, told of his request to me that I try to keep Cran from talking, at least until after the wedding.

"Odd reasoning for a guy who says he loves Polly," Red remarked. "I wonder why he doesn't use any means to stop her marriage. His tale about Crandall could be a Texas whopper. You were with him when he discovered the woman. He probably figures that if he can keep your mind occupied with Crandall you may not have time to think about his own possible involvement."

"That didn't occur to me," I said, "but if Grey did it why were people wandering around Arrowhead Hill last night?"

"Lots of people wander around at night for perfectly innocent reasons."

"I knew it. I knew it."

"Did you think of something else?"

"No. It's you. Every time I reach a conclusion about anything you ruin it. Now I'm completely confused."

"You aren't the only one, but Gin, you're so easily deluded. You have a strange idea that bits of circumstantial evidence lead logically to the conclusion you want to make—will indict a person you have decided committed a crime. Exactly what evidence do you have against Crandall Sexton?"

"His behavior the night I arrived. I wrote about that to you. Poison ivy, and his confession to Grey Faldman. Isn't that enough?"

"No. You've just told me that both Pat and Fedder have poison ivy and that there's none in the lawns or the flowerbeds. Grey Faldman says Crandall confessed. Did you hear the confession? No, you did not. You're taking a stranger's word for it."

"He's not a stranger. He's a delightful young man, though I was frightened for a moment this morning. But it was my imagination."

"Perhaps it wasn't imagination. What did he do?"

"Nothing. Just grabbed hold of my shoulders when I wasn't expecting it. Grey Faldman didn't kill that girl. I'm sure he didn't."

"I doubt that he did, too, and I also doubt that Crandall is the villain. First, Gin, there has to be a reason for murder. When the woman is identified, and this should help"—he held up the charge-a-plate—"then the motive for the crime can probably be established. When the motive is known those who might have that motive will be suspect. Psychology isn't my field, but I know there are such things as split personalities, the Jekyll not knowing what the Hyde is doing, but the theory that Crandall killed and doesn't know it, that he stripped his victim, hid her clothes and doesn't know where is too preposterous to believe."

"It is preposterous. It's all preposterous. And what does our little Santa Claus, bird-watcher, pickpocket have to do with all of this? I didn't tell you yet about

my conversation with him at the aunties'. And you haven't told me anything."

After I had finished the tale about Felix, Red shook his head in wonder.

"Gin, I don't know how you do it. You can never tell anything from the beginning; you remember something important and go back and stick it in as though it were a forgotten comma, and yet you can think on your feet and put on an amazing amateur production as you did last night during our phone call. You're so—uncollected."

"I know it," I said. "But it's your fault that I'm uncollected. You never let me tell things the way I want to. And why are you here?"

"Isn't it obvious? The police think I can be of service, particularly working on the inside with you."

"Why don't they use a trained man? Why a reporter?"

"Because I'm so bright and because I know you. So just listen and report and don't ruin your record by doing anything foolish."

"Tell me what I am to do and what I'm not to do. And what do you know?"

"I know who Felix Ponell is and where he is, thanks to you. The police know he is a member of every bird society in the country. They know he hasn't been caught pickpocketing since that night we saw him. However, they don't know whether he's still connected with the pickpocket ring, whether the Sextons are involved or why he went to the morgue this morning and asked permission to view the body of the murdered woman."

"Did they let him?"

"Sure."

"Did he identify her?"

"No."

"Do they think pickpocketing and the murder are tied together?"

"They don't know and they aren't going to reach hasty conclusions on little evidence. What's tonight's program?"

"The rehearsal is at six and we're to go to the country club for the rehearsal dinner. It can be over at ten or last all night. I have no way of knowing what the life span of this shindig will be."

"Maud told me there would be no dinner here tonight, so I'll have time off and I'll be able to have a long conference with the police. I'll tell them what you've told me and I'll meet you after you get back from the country club. Where?"

"There's a room they call the morning room. I don't know why. It's off the dining room and has an organ in it, chintzy furniture—I don't mean cheap, I mean material—and one end is a sort of winter conservatory. All glass with tiers of plants on benches. We might meet there. The library is locked at night. It's full of loot that may not be insured. The new help the agency sent could have light fingers."

"Or the invited guests," Red said.

"I'm only going to steal one spoon and that's for Father. Oh—Red! Father is going to put me back in a playpen when I get home."

"Then I'll come and baby-sit," Red said.

"Please—don't give me much publicity."

"Me? I don't give you publicity. You make your own. Now, we meet in this morning-greenhouse place an hour after you get back from the country club. That is, if every one is in bed. I'll be there and you come as soon as you can."

I agreed as I turned the knob on Maud's door, preparing to leave. "Oh—I just remembered. The morning I mailed the letter to you I talked to a little old man in a Model A Ford. He warned me about going to the lake at night and he just might have heard or seen the murder of that woman. Tell the police about him."

"Do you know his name?"

"No, but he resembles an Ezekial. That also reminds me. I told Maud that your mother—Father's first wife, I suppose—was a Latin scholar. Good-bye, Cicero."

8

WEDNESDAY NIGHT

THE light rap on Polly's door was not answered, so I turned the knob quietly and entered the room unbidden. She was sleeping but in so contorted a position that I couldn't resist going over and straightening out her leg. There was a purple-green bruise on her shoulder. As I unfolded her she moaned in low key but didn't waken.

"Bless you," I murmured sentimentally, brushing her forehead with a wispy kiss. There she lay, a female Atlas with the weight of the world on her shoulders, waiting for tomorrow when she would swear eternal vows until Pat found something better, which I felt sure he would do as soon as he had cashed in on the marriage settlement. Or was the settlement something Crandall had dreamed up in a moment of hallucination? How much truth had there been in Cran's confession to Grey? Damn Red for making me suspicious.

At six o'clock the wedding party had assembled in the morning room. Reverend Salik had taken us over the route we were to follow the next day: out the morning-room door to the terrace, across to the broad steps by the little pool, down and across the lawn to the statue of St. Francis. The altar would be in front of St. Francis. Canvas had been laid over strips of plywood from the terrace steps to the good saint. For the wedding white muslin would cover the canvas.

Reverend Salik talked to us solemnly, impressing upon our frivolous minds the sacred meaning of the wedding

service, the hope that none of us would consider it an occasion for excessive imbibing, the devout wish that each of us would conduct himself in such a manner that the ceremony would be dignified and spiritual as well as joyous.

The organist, a young man with the usual lock of noxious yellow hair dripping over one eye, sat at the little Baldwin electronic organ in the morning room and ran up and down the keys in a Bach fugue to assure us he wouldn't trip over Lohengrin. The organ had been moved from its usual niche to a window that opened onto the garden.

The minister, the groom and the best man would reach St. Francis by skirting the congregated guests on the side of the rose garden, which was flamboyantly blooming for Polly.

We rehearsed. We walked up and down the canvas-covered plywood. I took Polly's nonexistent bouquet, waited for Pat to slip on the ring. Reverend Salik was finally satisfied that his actors wouldn't muff their lines, that this wedding might lead to a bishopric. As Father's daughter, I can sniff the candidates the moment I see them administering the sacraments.

By seven we were back in this world, having cocktails on the terrace. At seven-thirty, four cars left Arrowhead Hill for the country club.

At eleven o'clock Crandall Sexton and I were alone in the private dining room. Norman and Janet Orre and Steve's mother and father had gone back to Arrowhead Hill; everyone else was dancing. Crandall was looking at the golden friendship circle I had pinned on my shoulder. The circles were Polly's gifts to me and her bridesmaids.

"Symbolic gift," Cran remarked as I moved the tip of a finger around the circle.

"I hope I'm Polly's friend," I said.

"I hope you are, too," he said. "I wish I were."

"You don't need to be a friend. You're her brother."

"Shouldn't brothers be friends?"

"Let's not quibble," I said. "Don't tangle with

words. Semantic purists make me ill. You're Polly's brother—so—?"

"Have it your way. I'm Polly's brother, so—so, if I were a good brother I'd stop this marriage."

"You would?"

"I would."

"Why?"

"Because it's not right. Polly isn't in love with that—that gorilla."

I looked at Crandall's unattractive face and wondered if he were jealous of every handsome man.

"Did Polly tell you that?" I asked.

"She doesn't have to tell me. I know Polly. She's been in love with Grey Faldman since she could pronounce his name. Who is Patrick Wiere? Where did he come from? Why hasn't Mother investigated his family tree? And those two imports from New York. Pat's Harvard pals! Old school chums. Neither he, nor they, have ever seen an ivied hall. They're both hired actors."

"Oh, no, Cran!"

"Oh, yes, Cran," he mimicked me. "Have you talked to either of them—listened to them?"

"Yes."

"What do you think?"

"It's neither fair, nor kind, to say what I think," I said.

Crandall ran a forefinger around the golden pin on my shoulder, then studied the tip of his finger.

"A friendship circle," he muttered, rose quickly, paced to the end of the table, returned, gripped the back of his chair, then, leaning toward me, said, "I'll stop her wedding."

"No, Crandall, no! Why?"

"Because—"

"Yes?"

"I can't tell you. I can't tell anyone. No—no, I won't stop it. I'm a coward. Even though I'm sure Pat is holding something over Polly's head—blackmailing her into marrying him. I'm craven. Afraid. Have you ever been afraid, Gin?"

"Yes, Cran, I've been afraid."

"Not really afraid," he said. "You say it too complacently. You don't know what fear is." He clutched the chair so hard that its back legs succumbed and slid and it crashed to the floor just as Tod, with one of the bridesmaids on his arm, waltzed into the room.

"Time to change partners," Tod caroled.

It was evident that the little girl clinging to his elbow didn't agree, because she turned her back on us, went to the small table at one end of the room where an inexhaustible bar had been set up and poured herself a three-ounce Scotch.

I didn't refuse Tod's invitation to dance even though I died inside thinking of the insolence of the bloodless bridesmaid and how she would ignore and insult Cran. I rationalized my behavior by assuring myself it was for the good of everyone, all the while knowing I wanted to escape from Crandall and wanted to dance—and wanted, too, to talk with this strange creature named Tod. I followed his intricate maneuvers with as much grace as possible. My dancing is archaic, for Red thinks the last step invented was the fox trot.

"You intrigue me," Tod said as we whirled. "There's something glamorous about you. You're so deliciously naïve, so delectably out of this world. I adore you, Virginia Crane. And such an earthy name. I do love earthy names."

"You mean peasant?" I asked.

"Peasant?"

"Yes. You know, digging-potato peasant. Grubbing-in-the-good-earth peasant. Is that what you mean?"

"Sweet! How cool can a hot girl get? You know what I mean."

"I know what you mean," I said and nuzzled my head on his nauseatingly perfumed shoulder.

We swirled and floated through five minutes of Tony Tamborough's Tantalizing Tenths. Tony blew on a trombone and swiveled his hips; the boys in the background put on their country club grimaces and played it cool, boy, cool.

"Where can I see you, Gin?" Tod asked as we stood in front of Tony, applauding.

"Now," I said. "Let's get away from all this."

"Why not?" Tod said. "Let's."

We sat on a bench at the tenth green and I held Tod's anxious hands with a deterring grip.

"Your life sounds so exciting," I sighed. "You know such interesting people. Tell me about them."

"Why don't we talk about you?"

"I'm not exciting. Let's talk about them."

"What do you want to know?"

"How do they get to Broadway? Where do they come from? What makes them tick?"

Tod was willing to talk and I was willing to listen.

"Now," he said, after escorting me through some sordid back alleys to the footlights, "let's talk about you."

"No," I said, "let's talk about you. You're Pat's friend—went to Harvard with him. Isn't Cambridge charming?"

"Charming," he said.

By the time I'd got through dissecting Cambridge and Harvard I knew that neither Tod nor Pat had ever before crossed the Harlem River from Manhattan. Tod nodded when I misnamed Harvard buildings, didn't correct me when I put Radcliffe on nonexistent streets and wasn't even aware that I stuck Cambridge on the wrong end of Boston. But he was a professional. He waded out over his head with me as though he weren't in deep waters. I wished I would be able to hear him tell Pat off for not briefing him on details. Even while I was discovering that Tod was a phony, I couldn't help cheering him on for being a competent phony. "No matter what you select to do in this world," Father always told me, "do it well." Tod was doing it well and I would have given him an ecclesiastical kiss if I hadn't thought it would lead to an involvement Father wouldn't approve of. Ecclesiastical kisses are often mistaken for worldly ones.

"I'll remember you," Tod said as we shook the dew of the tenth green from our ankles.

"I doubt it," I answered. "But I'll remember you. Always."

I made it back to the clubhouse, doing a llama leap ten steps ahead of Tod, who might have been a chorus boy but who had always done his *entrechats* on the boards, not turf.

It was twelve-thirty before the wedding party arrived at Arrowhead Hill. Everyone had to have another drink and it was one o'clock before Steve gathered the bridesmaids together and drove them home. It was two o'clock before I felt sufficiently alone in the sleeping house and ventured out of my room and down the stairs to the morning room. I closed the door gently and whispered, "Are you here?"

"I've been here for three years," Red said. "And gardenias make me sick."

I sniffed the sweet-sickening air. "One is enough," I agreed.

We sat on the organ bench and spoke in low voices, a note above whispers.

"The best man is an actor," I said. "Cran warned me that he was—and he is. Hired from some theatrical agency. He's supposed to be an old schoolmate and he's never scribbled in a spiral notebook. And I think we can rely on Grey Faldman and his analysis of Cran. Cran is doing a big-brother act but he hasn't got guts enough to carry his heroics to the end. Wants me to do it for him."

"Intestinal fortitude is the word," Red said.

"I'm tired of being corrected on my choice of language," I said. "You know what I mean."

"I know what you mean," Red assured me. "And the laundry is in a room off the garage. I sorted all the soiled clothes tonight while Bertha and Fedder quarreled through a television drama. The button came from a shirt with a monogram on the pocket. N. O. That would be Norman Orre."

"So it would," I said. "Then it was Norman who followed Cran last night. It isn't really important. What did you and the police talk about?"

"Everything. They called the New York police about the charge-a-plate, but no one with the name of Getzler in the Bronx has been reported missing. They'll investigate further, however."

"How about the old man who mailed my letter?"

"He'd already talked to the police. He was poaching Monday night, said that Whitney Sexton had always allowed him to fish in the lake but his wife hadn't, so he had been fishing at night. He heard voices, heard a scream, saw a figure going around the boathouse but didn't know whether it was a man or a woman. The only constructive evidence he had to offer was that whoever it was did not go out the back way but went toward the house. Our poacher didn't stay—left immediately, going down a path to the back road, driving off in his car, which he had left in a lane entrance half a mile away. He was no help."

"It all fits then," I said, "whether you like my conclusions or not. Cran did it. Norman followed him. Janet Orre found that Norman was not in bed, or heard them, and went out to give consolation or whatever a mother gives to someone like Cran."

"You won't give up, will you, Gin? You keep forgetting there's something more than murder involved."

"No. I'm not forgetting there's something more. Cran definitely is disturbed about Polly—thinks there's something very strange about her marriage to Pat that could be a neurosis—I mean, Crandall could be neurotic."

"What's neurotic?"

"Don't be so difficult. You weren't born before Freud and you admitted this afternoon there could be split personalities, Jekylls and Hydes. Cran could be imagining things, but I'm sure he isn't. Pat's best man is about the phoniest best man I've ever met. A counterfeit. And Cran told Grey that Pat would benefit from Polly's will the moment he is her husband."

"Cran says. Cran says. To whom has Cran said all of this?"

"He said something to me tonight if you'd only listen. He said he was a coward, that he would stop Polly's

wedding if he weren't. Grey must have been telling me the truth. Does Felix Ponell fit anywhere?"

"If I knew I'd tell you," Red said. "I still don't know. No one does."

"Why did Felix go to the morgue?"

"Not because of morbid curiosity."

I thought of Felix Ponell and his twinkly eyes. "No. Felix is neither morbid nor morbidly curious. I like him."

"I'm sure you do. You like the halt, the blind, the scrofulous, the moronic, the beat boys and the bishop."

"Is that wicked?"

"No," Red said. "It's stupid."

We wasted the next minute with one of our senseless arguments.

"Quiet," Red said, ending it. "We're here as emissaries. Let's behave like Mr. Rusk."

"I'm not Mr. Rusk," I hissed. "If I were I'd be on the payroll. I'm only a maid of honor."

"You may be a maid," Red said, "but I don't know how much honor is connected with it." He patted my nylon-robed knee. "Don't let us down, Gin. You really are an emissary, whether you accept the title or not. And you're getting information. The trouble is you make up your mind too quickly. Tell me what you know, but don't tie it with a ribbon. I'm listening and relaying everything you say but your conclusions. You're very important."

"I am?"

"Who else? You're the only person here who knows the principals and can observe from the inside. Who else would have recognized Felix Ponell and written me about him? Who has listened to and reported on the Sextons? Who found clothes in an attic and had sense enough to take the one important piece of evidence—the charge-a-plate? Who talks to everyone and picks their brains? You."

"But you just said I was stupid."

"In a wonderful, sympathetic way," Red consoled me. "Divine stupidity. St. Paul would approve."

"Will Father?"

"Your mother will," Red said. "And in time, your father. And I do."

"I'm afraid, Red," I said.

"Of what?"

"Of myself. I'm afraid I may say something inadvertently that will reveal that I'm spying. I may let spill that I know about Felix, about Cran's murder of his father."

"The pantry boy will check on Miss Crane every hour on the hour from now until she leaves on the same plane he does." Red paused, and during the pause we heard the faint hum of the organ. "How do you turn this thing off?" he asked. "That low moaning has been seeping into my eardrums for hours."

"I don't know," I said, peering at the gadgets in the dark. Then we heard another noise, voices outside the open window. We both slid to the floor as with one reflex and sat there, our heads against the seat of the organ bench just below window level.

"Can you sleep, Cran?" we heard Norman Orre ask.

"No," Crandall answered, "but after tomorrow I will. I'll drink myself into oblivion and sleep and sleep and sleep."

"Don't take it so hard, son."

"I'm not your son," Cran snarled.

"No," Norman agreed.

"So don't call me son. You'll have a son after the wedding. Patrick Wiere, a phony from nowhere."

"That's no way to talk about your sister's fiancé."

"He's no good," Cran said.

"And you?"

There was a long pause.

"All right, I'm no good either. At least when I don't know who I am, I'm no good. If I could only remember. Oh, if I could only remember." There was a sob in Crandall's voice.

"It's unfortunate, Cran, that you've developed this strange twist in your personality, but it happens to many people. We know you didn't mean to kill your father—

didn't mean to kill the woman the other night. We'll protect you."

"How? How will you protect me?"

"First," Norman said, "it would be wise for you to sign over your money to your mother. You'll lose it anyway if it's ever discovered that you killed your father. She will administer it for you, see that you are well provided for. Then it would also be wise if you shook the dust of Arrowhead Hill from your feet—found a place in the world away from everything familiar. You have fine potentialities, Cran, and should not let these ghastly unpremeditated and unwarranted murders ruin the rest of your life. Now that you know what sort of person you are, with help, you can overcome your propensities for killing and have a productive and happy existence."

Cran's reply was twentieth-century printable, but I would have blushed to write it and Red would have blue-penciled it if I had. Red's a puritan.

"And you've arranged Polly's marriage," Cran went on.

"I?" Norman asked, astonishment in his voice.

"You. Pat Wiere knows about me. Who told him?"

"What makes you think Pat knows about you?"

"Because Polly's being railroaded into this marriage, that's why."

Norman laughed gently. "You are imagining things. How can anyone make a girl say I do unless she's willing to say it? Knock on your mother's door, Cran. She's still checking lists and jotting down last-minute instructions for herself. Ask for some sleeping pills. You'll feel better tomorrow."

Red suddenly writhed in agony. When he gets a leg cramp he goes into gyrations that an eel would envy. He had to stand to ease the cramp and as he did the bench tipped. I reached for it. At the same time I scrambled to my feet and a misdirected hand came down on the organ keys.

Not only had the organist forgotten to turn off the switch, he had evidently left out every stop, for there was

a blast of ear-splitting dissonance. Red grabbed for me in the dark and found my open mouth with his hand. So startled was I at the unexpected mouthful that I clenched my teeth and the bite I gave his thumb must have been painful, for what he whispered was not a minced oath, puritanical as he is. I grabbed him and we slipped from the morning room, into the dining room, through the pantry and into the kitchen just as we heard footsteps hurrying through the front of the house. The front door must have been the only one that had been unlocked and Norman and Cran had had to circle the house to get in.

Red opened one of the myriad doors in the kitchen and an automatic light lit up a utility cupboard. When the door closed behind us the light went off, but not before I had spied a sturdy vacuum cleaner. I sat on its rounded back. Red stood, his arms wrapped around mop and broom handles.

We heard lights being switched on, muttered voices, lights switched off, voices dying away. After what seemed time enough for a reincarnation, Red whispered, "Let's get out of here. No oxygen. There's nothing left in here but carbon dioxide."

"I'll go first," I whispered, "and turn on all the lights as I go. No one will question me then. I have an established reputation for coming to the kitchen for a glass of milk when I can't sleep."

As I started to rise my foot hit something that jumped and snapped like an oversized birthday cracker. I yelped and reached for anything at all for support and what met my fingers was a dustcloth hanging from an overhead hook. The rag ripped as I grabbed and I slid gently backward off the vacuum cleaner. Red's reaction must have been chivalrous, for I felt a groping hand on my knee as I heard the clatter of mop and broom handles unloosed at the same time the snake-rope attachment of the vacuum dropped from somewhere and haloed my head with woven plastic. Neither Red nor I breathed for moments. Then, in the suspended silence, the door was opened from the outside and Red, his forest of handles

at abstract angles, and I, my knees hugging the vacuum, my feet in the air, a mousetrap hanging from a corner of my robe, were spotlighted.

It was Maud looking at us. She was speechless for a long moment.

"You two!" she finally gasped. "Cicero! Stepbrother, indeed!"

"Sssh," Red said.

"Sssh? What do you mean, sssh? You've made enough noise to wake the dead."

Red unsnapped the mousetrap and gave me a hand-up.

"You've caught us, Maud," he whispered. "Could we go to your room and explain?"

"You'll explain right here," she said, folding her arms righteously, barring our way into the kitchen.

"No, please, Maud," I said, "we mustn't be seen together. It will ruin everything."

"All right," she said grudgingly, lowering her voice to match ours, "but you'd better have a good story. What a place to go for love-making. A broom cupboard!"

In her room she even consented to sit in the dark as we whispered our pleas. I sat on the wide arm of her lounge chair as she settled stolidly into it, waiting to be convinced of our innocence.

"Remember the first morning I was here, Maud," I said, "you told me that things weren't good—that they were different? Well, they aren't good and that's why Cicero, Red Mulvaney, is here."

"Are you a detective?" she asked him.

"Not exactly," Red said, "but I'm supposed to detect and I have been sent here by authorities, the law. Gin is helping me. You understand we can't tell you what we're doing, what we're looking for, but it isn't sport. It's serious."

"You told me one story this afternoon. How do I know this one is true?" Maud asked.

"You don't," Red said. "You just have to take our word for it."

"It is the truth, Maud," I said. "You must know that

sane people wouldn't meet in a cupboard with all that seductive June night outside to wander in. We were hiding from some people who are on the prowl tonight."

"Can we trust you?" Red asked her.

"I'm as trustworthy as the next one," Maud grumped.

"Please, Maud," I pleaded, "don't tell anyone about us."

"You do seem like two nice young people, but I don't know. Looks are deceiving."

"Don't you want to help Polly?" I asked.

That did it. "I'd do anything—anything for Polly," Maud said staunchly.

"Thank you, Maud," Red said. "You won't regret it. Don't tell anyone what happened tonight or about Gin and me and it would be best if you kept your door locked. If we've been heard or seen with you it might not be too healthful."

Maud and I watched Red slip away in the dark, then I started on the long trek to my room, doing as I said I would: turning on the light in a room as I entered it, switching it off as I left it. The hall lights were ablaze as I started up the stairs and I tried not to hesitate when I saw Norman Orre leaning over the upstairs hall railing watching me ascend. There was something in his eyes I had not seen there before. Something coldly austere, piercing, frightening, as though those eyes were prodding into my brain.

As I neared the top of the stairs I swallowed and asked faintly, "Did it waken you, too?"

"What?" he asked with no smile.

"The organ," I said. "It sounded as though someone had dropped a brick on the keyboard. I'm sure I tossed for an hour before I came down for my usual sedative. I'll look like a hag tomorrow."

"I doubt it," he said. "Did you meet anyone downstairs. See anyone? Hear anyone?"

"I didn't hear any more music. Why? Do you think it wakened others?"

"No, I do not. This is a well-insulated house. The only keyboard is in the morning room and no one up-

stairs can hear sounds from there even if the morning-room door is open."

"They can't?"

"No, they can't."

"Why did I hear it then?"

"Why did you?"

"I don't know. My bedroom window is open and"—I remembered the open morning-room window—"and the morning-room window is open. I suppose the sound carries outside if not inside."

"How do you know the window is open?"

"It must be if I heard the noise. The window was open during rehearsal, so I suppose it still is."

"Oh. I'd better have Janet talk to Fedder about closing up more securely at night."

"Yes, she should. A summer storm could ruin the organ."

"So it could," he said, turning slightly as I reached the top step and started down the hall. "Good-night, Gin. I would advise you to stay in your room no matter how sleepless you are. Young girls shouldn't be wandering around at night. Young men might wander too and a minister's daughter should be like Caesar's wife."

"Beyond reproach?"

"Beyond reproach," he repeated. "She also might hear and see things that are better not heard or seen, or if heard or seen, never mentioned. You are circumspect, are you not?"

"I've forgotten the definition, Norman, but if it means discreet, do I mind my own business, yes, I'm circumspect."

"Make sure that you are," he said flatly and followed me with his eyes as I walked the six miles to my bedroom door.

9

THURSDAY MORNING

I LIFTED a leaden head from my pillow and looked out with one eye at the sun-drenched morning. At least the weather wouldn't ruin Polly's wedding. I opened the other eye and shifted my gaze to the purple chair, on which I had tossed my robe before quivering into bed the night before. Night? Three o'clock in the morning.

Now I silently addressed the chair: Does Red believe the story I told him about Cran? We hadn't had a chance to discuss Norman and Cran's conversation, but it should have proved that Grey Faldman hadn't been lying. I had forgotten to ask Red if the police were going to dredge the lake again for the clothes and we had made no plans to meet anywhere, made no plans for any kind of communication. How could I tell Red about Norman and his icy-eyed admonition to me? Had Norman suspected I had heard him and Cran and been trying to tell me to keep that information to myself? Or did he think I knew something I didn't? Did he also think that a guest who wandered around at night—two nights in succession—was doing too much wandering?

The purple chair was noncommittal, so I went to the bathroom and slathered around with toothpaste and soap, tripped over the bathmat, barked a shin on the dressing table leg, nicked a fingernail on the sharp edge of a cologne bottle cap and got a bug in my eye. My

horoscope would probably tell me to go back to bed, but there wasn't an astrologer within miles and, like it or not, I had to face the day.

Not wanting to face it alone, I knocked at Polly's door, feeling the need for company, not wanting to go down and say good-morning to a murderer, his family, a groom who made me squirm and a best man and usher who reminded me of something unpalatable from a play about the decadent South.

"Come in," Polly answered. She was having breakfast in bed. "A bride's privilege," she said, "even though every hand is needed and the help is inexperienced. Cicero brought it up. Isn't he a dear?"

"A darling," I said.

"I simply adore redheaded men. There's something so fey about them."

"He's fey. Right out of St. John Gogarty with a touch of James Joyce. Born under a toadstool at midnight in a Dublin pub."

"You forgot Sean O'Casey," she said. "Do you want a swig of my coffee? It's hot."

"No, thanks. I'll get my own. Is there anything I can do for you today?"

As though it were a TV commercial Polly switched off her bantering mood and was suddenly serious.

"Yes," she said slowly.

"All right. I'm waiting."

"Help me, Gin."

"I will, darling, but help you do what?"

She leaned back against the pillows, clenched her hands and bit her lower lip until the flesh grew white in a semicircle above her chin.

"Polly!" I exclaimed.

"No," she sighed. "You can't help."

"Maybe I can. What do you want me to do?"

"Help—help me get through this day. Just by being here, Gin."

"But I am here."

"Yes, so you are and I've neglected you. I wanted you here and yet I've been afraid to talk, sure that I would

say too much and now— Oh, Gin, is there any way you can stop this comic tragedy?"

"Comic tragedy?" I echoed haltingly.

"This marriage I asked you to lend yourself to. I can't go through with it. I thought if you were close by I could, but I can't. I—I—can't."

"Why, Polly," I said. "Don't you—you—"

"Love Pat?" she finished for me.

"Don't you?"

"I don't even like him."

"How awful!" I said, slumping down on the edge of Polly's bed, yet thinking how much more awful it would be if she did.

"Not as awful as things that could happen, Gin." She folded her hands behind her head and looked at the ceiling. "Remember Miss Nedwick and our course in Ancient History? Remember how incensed all of us undergraduates were at the way men used women for pawns, sold them, bartered them, auctioned them to the highest bidder? How we laughed and declared that we were emancipated, twentieth-century women and no one would use us as pawns? The century has nothing to do with it."

"Are you a pawn, Polly?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I'm not a knight or a bishop, a king or a queen. Because I have no other choice."

"Have you forgotten Voltaire? Everyone has a choice."

"Then I choose to be a pawn." She leaned toward me. "No—I don't choose it. I have no other choice. I must."

"Can you tell me why?"

"I shouldn't."

"Then don't. Don't tell me, but I think I suspect. Is it Cran? Are you marrying Pat to protect your brother?"

Polly's eyes flew wide open. "What do you know, Gin?"

"I don't *know* anything."

"Yes," she said after a long pause, during which she lifted the bed tray and plunked it on its spindly legs at the foot of the bed. "Yes, I'm protecting Cran. It's simpler this way. Cran has done something. He didn't mean to do it, Gin—he doesn't even remember doing it —but it was a crime, a dreadful, dreadful crime. Pat knows it, even the details. I refuse to pay blackmail the rest of my life. By marrying Pat I was able to make a handsome settlement on him that our lawyer hasn't questioned. I'll get a divorce in a few months and guarantee silence with a final settlement that will give Pat all the things he wants: luxurious ease embroidered with women, jewels and cars."

"Money never guarantees silence," I said gravely. "Silence can't be bought, Polly. Silence is silence only when there is a pact of love and understanding." I had either read the solemn words in the *American Weekly* or heard Father say them to a parishioner. They weren't mine.

Polly looked at me with frightened eyes. "No, Gin, no! Pat and I—he's promised. We do have an understanding."

"Understanding! You and Pat don't speak the same language. 'Promise' means one thing to him and another to you. You can't do this, Polly. Sell yourself to protect a brother who hasn't the—"

"Don't malign Cran, Gin," Polly snapped, fire in her eyes. "I won't stand for it. Everyone does. Mother, Norman, even the relatives—the aunties. They've never comprehended what goes on in Cran's mind, why he is the person he is."

"Do you understand him?"

"No. But I don't have to. He's my brother and I love him. Isn't that enough? Do we all have to understand one another? He's older than I and yet I've had to protect him. The gods didn't seem inclined to give Cran anything but a sweet kindness and so few ever see it or know it's there. But I know." She leaned back against the pillows as though she would have liked to stay there forever. "I'm sorry to make you a part of a wedding so

depraved and yet I had to have you here. You're so reassuringly normal, Gin."

"Does your mother know what you're doing?" I asked.

"No." Polly shook her head wearily.

"But Polly, this big affair—this lavish production you're putting on. Why didn't you go to City Hall—get it over with?"

"Pat suggested that," she said, "but I explained how the Sextons got married and that if I did it any other way there would be shaking of heads and asking of questions. I didn't know Pat had no friends and would hire charlatans to pose as old school chums. I also thought a big wedding with lots of publicity might bring Pat into the limelight. I've been hoping all these months that something out of his past, something—anything might happen to release me. It was vague in my mind, very vague. I didn't know what could happen or how it could. I just hoped. But nothing has and today is here."

"Can't you pay Pat without marrying him?" I asked, inwardly shuddering.

"Not with an old family lawyer handling the estate. Why would I give a casual acquaintance a fortune? No, Gin, marrying Pat is what I must do."

"How did Pat discover—whatever it is about Cran?"

"Cran was on one of his drunken sprees in New York—in a night club. He was wandering from table to table confessing his sins and Pat heard him. Everyone else shrugged him off as another worrisome boor, but Pat followed him to his hotel, found out who he was, found that there was some substance to Cran's wild talk. I was in New York at the time and two days later Pat sat next to me at the Met. Simple, isn't it, when you know how to go about it."

We were both silent for a long while, then Polly started to laugh. Not hysterically, but laughing with the lilt that set her apart from those who laugh as I do, from somewhere at the bottom of an esophagus.

"Don't look so downhearted, Gin. I said it was a

comic tragedy, didn't I? Or did I say a tragic comedy? It's the same. And thanks, darling, for listening. I feel much better and it isn't really so awful—I can think of many worse things that could happen. What are a few months out of my life? Forget it and drink to my health and happiness."

"Forget it! Aren't you afraid, Polly? Aren't you afraid of Pat? Physically afraid?"

"No," Polly said. "That's one thing I'm not. Pat is a big, burly, awkward man. I have a gorgeous purple bruise on my shoulder thanks to his awkwardness. He tried to keep me from falling against the car the other night when I tripped and he knocked me even harder against it. The only thing he does well is drive a car."

"Even awkward men are strong. He might kill you."

"Pat won't kill me. He's the beneficiary of my will, but I don't intend to die until long after the divorce, at which time I'll change it. He thought he was clever getting me to sign it, but I showed him—only last night—a copy of the letter attached to it. The letter is to Cran and if my demise comes soon after I'm married Cran will know everything and I depend on him either to have Pat brought to justice or to kill him himself. Pat will have to be content with the settlement. He should—it's half my inheritance. And Pat won't risk harming me. He's a coward." Polly leaned over and patted me on the shoulder. "Now darling, run along. I have to stay out of the way until Pat is disposed of. It's bad luck, you know, for a bride to see the groom on her wedding day until she meets him at the altar."

"Polly, Polly, Polly," I repeated slowly, shaking my head in consternation.

"I'm going to write notes all morning, so if you can think of ninety different ways to say 'thank you very much,' come up and tell me." She blew a kiss at me from her fingertips and I left her.

Everyone but Polly was at breakfast on the porch. It was a chattering group at three tables. I sat beside

Steve's mother, Alice Sexton, a friendly person who could encompass an entire group in the warmth of her outgoing personality. I avoided looking at Norman Orre, who sat at another table with his wife, but I couldn't quite avoid looking at Tod, who sat opposite me, next to Steve. I would have preferred not to have Tod for breakfast, but there he was and there was I and I had to answer his saccharine greeting with a plastered-on smile. If only I could catch Red's eye and cue him to pour a stream of hot coffee down Tod's neck—

"I read an interesting article not long ago," Alice Sexton was saying. "It was on betting odds about birth dates. I'm always hazy about articles—never know where I read them, and forget the gist—but this one said that the odds are very high, or is it low, that in a group of twenty, or was it twenty-five, there would usually be two people born on the same day. Not the same year, of course, but the same day of the month. How many of us are here?"

"We sound like fifty," Steve said and started to count. "Thirteen."

I counted, too. The thirteen included the maid and Red.

"Let's try it with thirteen," Alice Sexton said. "I know your birth date, Steve; I happened to be there." She smiled at her son. "What's yours?" she asked Tod.

Tod's birth date was the tenth of June. Everyone breakfasting on the porch was questioned and there were no two who had the same date. It was Red's turn. He was smothering the fire under a chafing dish.

"And you, young man—what's your name?" Alice Sexton asked him.

"Cicero," Red replied. "Cicero Getzler, and I was born on the twenty-ninth of February."

At another table Pat dropped his fork; it hit the coffee cup, the cup broke and the coffee streamed out. Red quickly went to him, removed the china, snatched Pat's napkin and soaked up the coffee as it started to dribble onto Pat's knees.

"You're certainly quick with your hands," Alice Sexton commended him.

Red grinned at her. "That's because I come from a long line of pickpockets."

"I do love the Irish," Alice beamed, then cried, "Why Janet—Janet—"

Janet Orre, who had stood up during the confusion, was crumpled on the floor in a dead faint.

At eleven o'clock Arrowhead Hill was abustle with clattering noise and hurrying figures. Coveys of men were setting up chairs in the garden and tables on the lawn. Florists were dropping petals and snips of greenery in every downstairs room, the maid following them with a brushbroom and a dustpan. Caterers' wagons came and went. Altar Guild ladies were arranging the churchly impedimenta on the altar in front of St. Francis. Gardeners were snipping faded blossoms into baskets and pulling a weed that hadn't been there yesterday. It was a Cecil B. deMille scene: colorful, well-planned bedlam.

Alice Sexton was draping a beautiful cloth on the banquet table in the dining room as I walked through on my way to the kitchen, where I hoped to find Red among the mob and talk with him unnoticed.

"I wonder how many women went blind working on this," Alice commented, smoothing an embroidered hump. "It's so exquisite and to think it will be covered with champagne stains and cigarette holes by evening. But I suppose it's expendable. Polly's wedding deserves the best, though it always hurts me to see priceless linen treated like paper cloths you buy for a child's birthday party." She moved to a serving table and started sorting silver. "Poor Janet. She wanted to arrange this room herself."

"How is she?" I asked.

"A wreck. I hadn't seen Janet for two years and I was positively shocked when I realized what a state she had got herself in. I've helped friends with elaborate wed-

dings and I know what a strain they are, but Janet is more unnerved than any other mother-of-the-bride I've ever known. I told Maud to take Janet's lunch up to her and told Janet to rest all morning. She's in no condition to go with the rest of us to Beestons'."

"It was kind of the Beestons to ask us," I said.

"That's what friends are for, especially when the wedding is at home. Maud couldn't feed all of us in this maelstrom with inexperienced help, but I must say, Cicero is capable. Imagine a redheaded Irishman named Cicero Getzler."

"It does sound as though his mother married outside the tribe," I said.

"Yes, but love has a way of crossing national boundaries. Polly has a lot of the Rhine in her blood stream and she's marrying an Irishman. I declare, though, Pat's mother must have seen the first light of day close to the Mediterranean even if his father still speaks Gaelic. Gin —may I call you Gin?"

"Please do."

"Would you ask Maud where the candles are?"

Maud was directing caterer traffic in the kitchen. She knew where the candles were, but she didn't know where Red was. She had enough to do, she told me tersely, thinking about a quick lunch for the help and keeping pokey-nosed outsiders from devastating her kitchen. She couldn't keep track of the pantry boy.

I helped Alice Sexton unwrap candles, then wandered off to search for a white-coated, orange-headed reporter. I wanted to compliment him on his performance at breakfast and learn what he thought of the reactions. At the name Getzler, Pat had dropped his fork and at the mention of pickpockets, Janet Orre had fainted. And I had to tell him about my talk with Polly. I found him in the empty garage changing a tire on Pat's car.

"Since when have you learned the difference between a jack and a spark plug?" I asked.

"I've known for years," he replied, "but I've hesitated to let you know how varied my knowledge is. It

might make you feel inferior. And scram. We're a public spectacle in here."

"Why isn't Fedder doing this?" I pointed to the tire Red was bolting on.

"Fedder has driven the groom and his entourage to the country club for a round of golf. The groom must be got out of the way."

"Where are all the other cars?"

"Are you blind? Sitting there in the parking circle waiting to take you to lunch."

So they were.

"I don't care if we can be seen," I said, "I have to tell you about Norman Orre last night and what Polly said this morning and find out what you think you learned by the breakfast scene."

"Not now, Miss Crane. A gentleman is strolling this way. Meet me in Maud's room at twelve-thirty."

"Did Pat have trouble?" Norman Orre asked, walking into the garage and standing behind Red's squatting figure. "Why didn't he call a garage if he's too inept to do this himself? It seems to me there's enough to be done around here without engaging your services as a mechanic."

"I offered to do it, sir."

"Your talents amaze me. I hope they include life-saving reticence along with audacity."

Red finished tightening the last bolt, then sat on the garage floor and looked up at Norman.

"I'm sorry, sir, you've lost me. I only went to the eighth grade."

"Did Miss Crane do your homework for you?"

"Miss Crane?"

"The young lady here who seems attracted to you."

"Oh, her. She came to tell me Maud was looking for me. I sure wouldn't mind if she was attracted to me, but I hope I know my station."

"I hope you do, too," Norman said. "I also hope that she does. I am going to take this opportunity to warn

both of you that meddling in others' affairs is often, shall we say, not conducive to good health?"

Red scowled, a stupid, slow-thinking scowl. "I don't get it. Have I done something wrong? Mom brought all us kids up to be polite. Of course we made her life a misery with our wise-cracking and jokes, but we never sassed her. And Uncle Al taught me how to be a good waiter and houseboy."

"Uncle Al?"

"Uncle Albert Getzler. Pop's brother. Him and his father before him were the best waiters in Milwaukee."

"Did you say Milwaukee?"

"Yes, sir. The Getzlers settled there 'way back, soon after the Civil War in the eighteen-sixties."

"Shall I tell Maud you'll be there soon?" I cut in.

"Soon as I put this stuff away," Red said, getting to his feet.

Norman caught up with me as I walked away. "I beg your pardon, Gin, if I implied that you were interested in the help."

"Help always interests me," I said. "I'll be willing to bet that Cicero was understating when he said he made his mother's life a misery, though he does seem courteous."

"Courteous perhaps, but there's something sly about him and I believe it's that quality that made me suspect he might have inadvertently opened a Sexton cupboard and found a skeleton."

"He hasn't been here long enough to open cupboards," I said.

"It never takes sly ones long. Cran gave you a glimpse of our skeleton, Gin, so you probably realize we're all under a strain. Even the most contained person misinterprets words and actions when coincidence seems to be too coincidental."

"I understand," I said, sweetly forgiving. "A big wedding, an unfortunate murder and poor Cran's fight with the bottle can upset anyone. I know you and your wife must regret the misfortunes—but it's a lovely day for a

wedding and when it's all over we can sing 'Auld Lang Syne.' You have a beautiful voice."

"Thank you. You sing well too."

"Mutual admiration?"

"From now on. Mutual admiration." He smiled paternally and we parted, he heading toward the front of the house, I toward the back.

"That's an intricate something you're wearing," Red remarked, surveying me as he leaned against Maud's door. "How do you zip yourself up the back?"

"A long chain on a little hook," I explained. "You throw the chain over your shoulder and pull. A bachelor girl can't live without one."

"Name the day and you can put it in the trash. I'll do the zipping."

We exchanged information then, and Red itemized our combined knowledge.

"The police got a chemist's report on the dead woman —a coroner's report. Time of death, some time between eleven and two in the morning. She wasn't a natural blonde: she was dark-haired. They found the clothes, minus the brassiere, in a rock-tied bundle under the branches of the fallen tree, so the clothes were probably thrown there Tuesday night, the night you saw the figures, since they hadn't been there during the day. Now they know the murdered woman is Mrs. Albert Getzler. Her purse matches the one you described, the one you took the charge-a-plate from. They had also checked up on both departed maids. One is Margo Higgs and the other, the one you thought might be the dead girl, is Marie Rank—that's her most recent name. Grey Faldman's story to you about Cran was the truth because Polly herself told you she is going through with a blackmail wedding and Cran suspects it because of the marriage settlement and the will Polly has made."

"How would Cran know?"

"He and Polly certainly have the same lawyer if he's an old family attorney and the lawyer must have told

him. A settlement of that kind makes a lawyer suspicious. Now—the name Getzler threw Pat into a panic and Janet Orre fainted at the mention of pickpockets. But did you notice that Cran showed no reaction to either. He may have killed his father, but he didn't kill the woman. I'm convinced of that."

"Who did?"

"Some one with poison ivy."

"Then it's Fedder?"

"No. He and Bertha had the evening off. They stayed all night at Bertha's sister's home in Norwood."

"Pat!"

"Right. Pat. And Norman Orre knows it. It was his shirt button you found, so it was he who followed Pat to the lake that night. What connection is there with Felix Ponell and pickpocketing? I've a theory, but it's only half-hatched. Felix didn't go to the morgue when he heard about the murder. He waited a day and went after the family dinner you told me about. Why? Who did he see there that made him suspicious? Remember, he warned you and said that something he had just discovered that evening had made it necessary for him to suggest that you keep quiet about your knowledge of him. Which of the three—Mrs. Orre, Norman or Pat—made him wonder if the murder might be connected with Arrowhead Hill?"

"All three, or any one of the three. He had never met any of them before. It's not Norman. We heard Norman speaking in such a kind, fatherly way to Cran last night when Cran practically admitted he was a murderer."

"We also heard Norman give his hand away this morning. He pretended, in his apology to you, that Cran was the skeleton in the cupboard. If Cran is the skeleton why did the name Getzler upset Norman?"

"It didn't. Just Pat and Janet Orre. Maybe his wife told Norman something had to be done about prying people. Remember you think the Sextons may have something to do with the pickpocket racket."

"No. Norman Orre is involved in it. During the kind,

fatherly talk with Cran he advised him to sign over his inheritance to his mother. If Cran does that and Patrick Wiere gets most of Polly's money who will control it all eventually?"

"Janet Orre."

"No. Think, Gin. How could she get her hands on Pat's money? Norman Orre probably can. There has to be some connection between him and Pat. How did Pat discover Crandall's secret?"

"When Crandall was pub-crawling."

"That can't be true. If Cran has the habit of confessing his crime in public, to any stranger, then it isn't a secret. Blackmail doesn't work when the world knows. Pat had to learn it from someone else. Who?"

"Norman."

Red cracked his knuckles. "We're warm, Gin, we're warm."

"Can we stop Polly's wedding without sending Cran to the death house?" I asked.

There was a knock on the door. Maud opened it.

"They're waiting for you out front, Virginia Crane," she said. "So be quick. Norman Orre is looking for you."

A mile down Faldman Road we turned into a lane where a woman named Mrs. Beeston welcomed us at a turn-around in front of a United States English manor house. The Arrowhead Hill guests were served jellied consomme, a hearty julienne salad, a flaky pastry embellished with red raspberries and espresso coffee that took the skin off my nose. Stimulated with events and espresso, I made precise mental notes of the people who surrounded me.

Steve's father, who looked tired or perhaps was merely bored, and his mother, Alice Sexton, didn't seem a part of the cast in Polly's tragic comedy, except as indispensable extras. Nor did Steve.

Cran, his unattractive face made uglier by inner torment, Pat and his pals blithely lapping up luxury, Nor-

man Orre, suavely chatting with Mrs. Beeston—all were on stage. Now, if they would only speak the right lines, not steal scenes nor upstage one another, Red and I might be able to ring down the curtain on a smash hit.

Red had said we were warm. How warm? I didn't know then that we were actually hot. I found it out at ten minutes after five.

10

THURSDAY AFTERNOON

AT twenty minutes after three a Rolls Royce, vintage 1935, stopped at Arrowhead Hill and Aunt Gwen, Aunt Eva and Felix Ponell stepped out with the aid of a chauffeur in maroon livery the same age as the car.

I had walked the lane to Faldman Road and back, trying to sort out my thoughts. I was incapable of thinking carefully without privacy and I had had to escape my room, which was being used for the bridesmaids to dress in, two of whom had arrived as we were all coming back from luncheon at the Beestons'.

"Virginia," Aunt Gwen greeted me as I approached them. "It is Virginia, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is."

"I love the name Virginia. It has a cello quality about it and I always wished it were my name."

"Gwendolyn does very well for you," Aunt Eva said tartly. "You even look like a Gwendolyn. I prefer Virginia's last name. Crane. Mr. Ponell will agree with me that a crane is a bird with beauty and grace and—"

"Long legs and no voice," Aunt Gwen interrupted. "Cranes! Spindly sticks they stand on and their feathers aren't even suitable for a hat."

"Hats," Aunt Eva sniffed. "That's all you matinee women think of. Hats and the poor, sewed-together pelts of tiny animals who died to keep you warm. Women who wear furs and feathers are inhumane. Cruelty for vanity's sake!"

Aunt Gwen pointed a white-gloved finger at her sister.

"Don't inflict your Mohammedan principles on others, Eva. I know they go only so far. No one loves a schnitzel or a pate more than you and that means butchered calves and maltreated geese. Virginia, where is Polly?"

"I can't say exactly. She was in the library unwrapping gifts half an hour ago."

"We came early, my dear," Aunt Eva said in a confidential tone as she took my arm. "We must watch Polly dress. It's a tradition. No Sexton puts on her wedding gown without Gwen and me. That's because we never had wedding gowns of our own and we bless them."

"Bless them?" I asked, without thinking, then tried to correct my gaucheness. "Certainly. A bride's dress should be blessed."

"Don't know what good it does," Aunt Gwen grunted. "The blessing doesn't make a bride any happier, doesn't give her any more children, doesn't prolong her life one day. It doesn't do anything at all except make Eva and me feel important."

"Mr. Ponell"—Aunt Eva turned to Felix, who had stood quietly by during our conversation—"perhaps Virginia Crane knows where the lake is. Do you?" she asked me.

"Yes, I do."

"Would you be gracious enough to point it out to him?" she asked, then said to Felix, "Mind your trousers and your shoes. The path may be muddy and overgrown. Full of beggar's lice. Can't have you untidy for Polly's wedding."

Aunt Eva turned and hooked a hand around the chauffeur's proffered elbow. An auntie clutching each of his arms, he paced himself to their unsteady steps and the three of them started toward the front door. Felix watched them with kindly eyes.

"Incredible women," he said. "Twenty more years and there go I. That is, if I live that long." He turned to me. "You don't mind, Miss Crane, showing me the way?"

"Not at all. I'll take you to the lake. It's not later than three-thirty and it takes me no longer than half an hour to dress. My room is full of sweet young things and I'd much prefer avoiding them until it's absolutely necessary."

"Good," he said. "Lead the way."

When we came out of the woods and stood on the shore Felix looked around him, delight and wonder in his eyes.

"Magnificent, magnificent. I had no idea," he said. "No idea at all. I thought it would be a scummy country pond. What an ideal place. Fields for grain, woods for nesting. Water. Everything." He walked to the boathouse and examined it carefully. "And this. I do believe it could be enlarged, made into suitable quarters for the overseer. I would like that, living right here."

"Would they?" I asked.

He turned and gave me a piercing look.

"They? The Miss Sextons?"

"No. Those 'some others' you warned me about on Tuesday night. Would they like you living here on the lake?"

"No. I doubt that they would," he said, then chuckled. "But what a joke on them if Miss Eva buys the property. Ideal, ideal."

"Ideal for murder, too, Mr. Ponell," I said.

"So it is, but murder can occur anywhere. I want to apologize for disturbing you unduly the other evening. At the time I was worried for you, but my worries were groundless. However, I hope you did follow my instructions and not speak of me."

"I did. I haven't mentioned you," I said, wondering if I could follow Red's daring bluntness and mention the name Getzler. Would Felix show any reaction? I took a deep breath and asked. "Mr. Ponell, why did several people at Arrowhead Hill panic at the mention of the name Getzler this morning?"

Felix reacted. I thought for a moment he, too, was going to faint, but he steadied himself by putting a hand

out and clutching the edge of one of the boathouse steps. I waited a long while for his reply. When it came it was a question.

"Who mentioned that name?"

"The pantry boy. The agency sent him yesterday. His name is Cicero Getzler."

"Oh—Cicero. Who became panicky?"

"Patrick and Mrs. Orre. Later Mr. Orre made some remarks to both Cicero and me. They made no sense whatsoever. He seems to have an idea that the boy and I have some sort of information, know something we shouldn't speak about. It's all most strange. Truthfully, I'll be glad to get away from here. Your warning to me, a murder and now the name Getzler seemingly synonymous with something unmentionable hardly make this a gay, convivial place."

Felix regained his composure. "The name actually is unmentionable," he said, "and I'll give you another warning. My advice to both you and that young man is that he change his position immediately, leave here tomorrow, and that you never mention the name Getzler again. Even after you're home and feeling secure and protected. The long arm of crime reaches into the most improbable places and it usually has a gun in its hand."

"You speak in riddles, Mr. Ponell. You warn me, you advise me, but you tell me nothing. Why should I take you seriously? And shouldn't I be afraid of you?"

He cocked his head on one side and scrutinized me at length, then smiled. "You know you shouldn't be afraid of me. For some unfathomable reason you have recognized, in me, my short-comings, evidently having the ability to see beneath the surface. Though you know what my profession was, that it was outside the law, you also know instinctively that I would no more harm you than I would harm a bird."

He took a handkerchief from his pocket, unfolded it carefully, put it on the bottom step and sat down, adjusting his trousers just so.

"Isn't it time for you to get dressed?" he asked, looking up at me. "You mustn't be late for Miss Sexton's

wedding. Though I wonder—" He pushed a delicate, blue-veined hand through his shock of white hair and said so softly that I scarcely heard, "Should I? Is it possible that my old eyes are failing me?" He looked up at me again. "You said the murdered woman's name was Getzler?"

What a nimble mind the little man had! I almost laughed with delighted admiration.

"No. I said the pantry boy's name is Getzler. It would be more than coincidence if it were her name, too. A dark-haired woman who can't resist becoming a blonde sounds as though she could be the pantry boy's kissing cousin."

"Dark hair?" Felix asked quickly. "How do you know?"

"I saw her. Any woman can spot bleached hair through a blizzard."

"Hmmm," he murmured. "Dark hair. Then my eyes really are failing. Leave me, Miss Crane, I must think. Should something unusual, something extraordinary happen this afternoon, you can forget my advice and you will understand everything. If it doesn't, remember my words. Every one of them."

I left him sitting on the steps and started back to the house. I heard, then thought I saw a movement in the woods, several yards off the path. It was evidently a woodchuck who stayed, immobile in his tracks, using nature's camouflage, for I stood for several moments, peering into the shadows, and could neither see nor hear anything more.

Getzler is a key word, I assured myself, hurrying along the path. Pat, Janet Orre, Felix—all were acquainted with the atonal name. Now to find Red and tell him about Felix.

But I had no time to hunt for Red; I had to help Steve hunt for Cran. He had disappeared and no one had seen him for hours. . . .

But the search proved fruitless and guests were arriving, so Steve had to start ushering and I had to dress.

At twenty minutes of five I poked my head through

Polly's open doorway. She was standing in the center of her room floating in a cloud of white. Aunt Gwen and Aunt Eva, upright on slipper chairs, side by side, were admiring her. Janet Orre, pale and thin-lipped, and Alice Sexton, clucking maternally, were smoothing and draping folds of filmy lace and heavy satin. Polly saw me.

"Gin, darling, are you dressed?"

"Completely," I said, "except that the hairdresser keeps chasing me with a comb."

"I want a glass of orange juice."

"Polly Sexton!" her mother moaned.

"I do, Mother. Actually I'm hungry, but I'd have to brush my teeth if I ate anything. Would you get me a glass, Gin? Go down the backstairs and no one will see you. They are at the end of the south ell. You'll see the door. It's right at the foot of the attic stairs. They lead to the butler's pantry. Maud always has a bottle of juice in the refrigerator."

I went through the butler's pantry to the kitchen. It was swarming with starched white jackets and rustling white uniforms. I dodged around them, opened the refrigerator, took out a bottle of orange juice, set it on a counter, found a tumbler, filled it and turned back to the refrigerator, the bottle in my hand.

The outside kitchen door opened and I stared at Grey Faldman as he stood for one short moment glancing around the room. His eyes glued themselves on the bottle in my hand and before I could move or speak he had taken three long steps and snatched it from me, turned, slammed the screen door behind him and was gone.

"Well, I never," said one of the caterer's assistants. "Just like that. He comes in—grabs orange juice—slams a door—! Queer goings on around here."

"Noises, too," said another. "I've been hearing a buzz for five minutes."

"Yeah. Somebody forgot to turn something off."

Their words bounced off my ear as I walked in a daze to the pantry, where I bumped into Red and dribbled orange juice on his immaculate white jacket.

"Blessed fate!" I gasped. "Red, the place is touched. Grey Faldman just grabbed a bottle of orange juice from my hand and ran; Felix Ponell has warned me again; the name Getzler does mean something to these people and no one can find Crandall. Have you seen him? " This all gushed out with no pause.

Red shook his head. "No, I haven't seen him. You say Grey Faldman grabbed orange juice? Where did Grey come from?"

"How should I know. He just opened the kitchen door and there he was."

"Where did you see Felix Ponell?"

"At the lake. I was his guide. Aunt Eva asked me to take him there. He wanted to see the sanctuary site and we had a talk. I'm not to mention the name Getzler, even when I get back home. That is, unless something extraordinary happens this afternoon and if it does he says I'll understand. Extraordinary isn't the word for what is happening."

"Orange juice," Red said, scratching his head, looking at the glass I held, idly rubbing the golden splash on his jacket. He repeated it, still puzzling, as Maud pushed open the door into the pantry from the kitchen. She was dressed for the wedding in something resembling a pup tent covered with cerise magnolias and her face was the color of putty.

"You, Cicero, or whatever your name is, go help them with Cran. He's been in the deep-freeze for God knows how long."

"Deep-freeze?" I almost shouted. "How could a big man like Cran squeeze into a deep-freeze?"

"It's a walk-in locker off the back entrance. He buzzed and buzzed and if I hadn't come out none of them idiots in the kitchen would ever have found him. Hurry. And you, Virginia Crane, find Steve and tell him to get another usher. There ought to be a young man out there who knows how." She backed into the kitchen, Red at her heels, but he turned at the door, his face alight as it always is when a thought or an idea is in full bloom.

"Gin. You left Felix at the lake—Grey must have been there. Orange juice! It's a quick antidote for insulin shock. Felix Ponell is a diabetic." Red pushed through the door.

I couldn't fly up the backstairs in four-inch heels carrying a glass of orange juice, but I didn't loiter. Polly accepted it with thanks and I ran down the hall, down the front stairs not caring who saw me, into the morning room, where I interrupted the organist in the middle of a bar and sent him out to retrieve Steve. Steve was fortunately idle, waiting to usher another guest. I clutched his lapels and whispered fiercely.

"You'll have to find an usher, Steve. Cran's been locked in the deep-freeze."

Steve choked on a sucked-in breath.

"Hurry! Get Cran's coat and tie and find some young guest with the proper pants and a white shirt. An old guest if you can't find a young one. No one will question Cran's absence. They'll think he's soused. I won't tell Polly or her mother."

The hairdresser grabbed me at the top of the stairs. I remember her muttering over my dishevelment, remember someone sticking a bouquet in my hands, remember going down the front stairs through the dining room to the morning room, where I was one of many waiting for five o'clock and the long, slow walk to the altar.

Steve had hurried and a young man with no chin, wearing a jacket three sizes too large, was in a huddle behind the organ with the bridesmaid he was to accompany back down the aisle.

From the morning-room door I watched Steve, with a ghastly Janet Orre on his arm, walk the length of the improvised aisle, watched him seat her, watched him return. I saw Reverend Salik, Pat and Tod as they walked between the rose garden and the seated guests to the altar; watched the ushers unroll the yards of white muslin, then join the groom and best man. I stepped out onto the terrace and, as *Lohengrin* pealed from the organ, started the procession of bridesmaids, the most reluctant maid-of-honor who ever trod the bridal path.

Norman Orre, with Polly lightly holding his arm, came slowly toward the altar and Janet Orre rose unsteadily. Tears were streaming down her cheeks. The guests stood up as a body, their heads politely turned halfway to watch the bride and her stepfather as they walked the long way. There was silence and the ceremony began.

" '—and is commended of St. Paul to be honorable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.' "

Reverend Salik paused for only a moment.

" 'Into this holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. If any man can show just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace.' "

There was no pause at all between the word "peace" and the chorus of voices coming from the terrace steps, not in unison. The chorus could have come from the Tower of Babel, but its substance, in English was "We have just cause and we speak."

The voices came from the pantry boy, Grey Faldman and a white-haired old pickpocket supported between them; from Maud, who had an arm around a blanket-swathed Crandall, and from Crandall.

The lexicographers would have to invent new words to describe the next few minutes adequately. The entire assemblage swiveled their heads backward as though someone had pushed a button on a giant mechanism that controlled every neck. Janet Orre fainted again and Norman, instead of going to her, grew roots and couldn't move. Reverend Salik's mouth hung open and he dropped his prayer book. Pat, after one shocked second, ran around the altar, smack into Saint Francis and knocked himself cold. Polly, with the first radiant look I had seen on her face since I had arrived, picked up her billowing skirts and ran the length of the white-muslin-covered aisle, her train floating behind like the smoke from a jet, and threw her arms around Cran.

The stampede started. There were squeaks and cries,

questions, gasps and mutterings accompanied by the rustling of dresses and the collapsing of chairs. I turned my back on it all, walked around the altar, stepped over Pat, giving him a pointed-toed kick, walked to the end of the rose garden, turned again and went across the lawn to the back of the house and in through the kitchen door. I swished through the catering crowd in the kitchen, still unaware of the fiasco, into the pantry and on into the dining room. With an irresistible urge to add to the others my own objection to Polly's marriage, I swiped a forefinger through the icing on the eight-tiered cake that sat majestically in the center of the banquet table.

It was delicious icing. A bit of almond with the vanilla. Licking my fingers, I went upstairs, found my clothes and took them to the sewing room, where I could dress without listening to the horrified words of the bridesmaids, who would soon be swarming into my room. I hung the beautiful coral silk on the rack and put the shoes beneath it.

"There," I said to them as I skinned into something more homey, "you'll do very well for Tamara at the policeman's ball."

11

FIVE TWENTY-FIVE P.M.

I WAS standing in my stocking feet, fastening the belt on my dress, when the sewing-room door opened and Janet Orre stood framed there, her eyes starkly wild. Crazed eyes. They held me immobile as though they were toggle bolts stuck through my feet into the floor. Before I could snap my belt she snatched a long, pointed pair of shears from the cutting table by the door, at the same time pushed the door closed, and without turning, reached a hand behind her back and turned the lock.

"I'm going to kill you, Gin, or disfigure you for life. No plastic surgeon will be able to repair the damage." She threw back her head and laughed. "You! The clever, coy minister's daughter."

The toggle bolts held secure. I didn't move. I couldn't move, but I knew I would have to. How could I get the shears from her before she slashed my face, put out an eye? Keep her talking, some intuitive inner voice said.

"You fainted—I saw you," I said. "And you cried. Tears."

"I'm almost as accomplished an actress as you." She smiled contemptuously. "This morning, yes, I fainted, but not this afternoon. As for the tears—doesn't every mother cry at her daughter's wedding? I watched you leave the garden. It was just as easy for me to leave, unnoticed in that milling mob, as it was for you."

"What have I done, Mrs. Orre?" I stammered. "What have I done to make you want to kill me?"

"As though you don't know what you've done. From

the moment I saw you standing in Polly's room at Glendore I have never trusted you. I should have known you would bring nothing but trouble, prying, spying, nasty creature that you are. Very clever, your open-faced, innocent milk-drinking in the middle of the night. Milk! Creeping around, listening! You followed Pat and Norman to the lake, watched Pat throw the clothes away. That's why the police dragged the lake again. You told them! That's where you were coming from when I met you on the stairs. You knew that Pat killed his wife—"

"Killed his wife? Pat had a wife?"

"Acting again. You do it very well, Gin, but you no longer fool me."

She advanced a step, holding the shears like a dagger. Keep her talking, I said to myself, keep her talking. And keep calm. Calm. Look at her. Look into her eyes. Stare her down. You're younger than she, but she's larger and will have the strength of maniacal fury. Say something.

"Yes, I'm acting," I said. "I knew that Pat killed his wife. He had to, didn't he, to keep her quiet? Hadn't he paid her enough?"

"There's never enough for a trollop of her ilk. She threatened to stop the wedding if she wasn't given a hundred thousand dollars last Tuesday. She came to collect it on Monday night. Little fool, as though anyone can pick a hundred thousand dollars out of a pocket. She asked to be killed and she was. Pat had to do it—but what a dolt he is! He shouldn't have left her to be found; he should have weighted her—put her in the lake. She should never have let Pat divorce her."

"Why did she?"

"I didn't ask," Janet Orre said, lifting her chin in a supercilious gesture. Then she spoke more slowly, emphasizing each word. "Don't move, Gin. I want you to remember this day for the rest of your life—if you live. You have ruined everything I worked for for four years and you must suffer as I will have to suffer. It would have been mine, all mine, because I'm as clever as Norman. Whitney's money belonged to me, all of it, and I was going to have it. Imagine—a Sexton Foundation!"

I groped for something to say, anything to say. "For birds?" I asked.

"No, that's Aunt Eva's hobby. I don't know what the foundation was to be for. No one told me, but I was to live on a pittance, a mere pittance while Whitney threw his inheritance away on grandiose schemes for the betterment of mankind. That's why I had to push him from the window before he changed his will. Then you—! I saw you in the garage this morning talking to the pantry boy. You drafted him, made him a part of your scheme, put him up to mentioning the name Getzler for the fun of it, hoping to scare Pat and Norman away."

"Getzler? How would I know anyone named Getzler?" I asked, urging her on.

"How do you know anything? By devious cunning. That's how you discovered Norman and Pat's real names. No doubt you've been going through drawers and suitcases, reading mail, listening to telephone conversations, spending all your time ferreting out facts that are none of your business. You couldn't drive to the airport to meet guests—no, you had to stay at Arrowhead Hill and spy. And Pat! It's almost incredible that Norman could have such an awkward, bumbling fool for a son. He hadn't enough sense to make sure that Cran was completely insensible after he hit him."

I didn't have to keep her talking now. I couldn't stop her. She had been wound with a key and, trapped as I was, stalling for time while trying to plan an escape, I wanted to wind the key tighter and break the mainspring because I couldn't bear hearing the words she spoke.

"You're all fools but me," she boasted. "You, Gin, and even Norman. How wily he thought he was, tucking the note under the door of my suite that night, blackmailing me into marriage because he had looked across the court of the hotel and had seen me push Whitney. Dear Norman didn't realize that two could play the game, that I wasn't the dupe he thought I was. He supposed I would keep him in luxury—more luxury than he had, for Norman is a wealthy man. But he was

afraid. Those wanted by the police always become fearful. I knew he was Frank Getzler soon after we met and how surprised he was a few months after our marriage to find I had collected, and locked in my safety deposit box, enough evidence to prove that he was a man outside the law. So it was a stalemate."

She smiled with self-admiration. "But Norman was a sport and we planned together from then on. It was his idea that Pat get a divorce and marry Polly, have Polly make a marriage settlement. We would have got it from Pat. A cunning plan it was, too, if Pat's wife hadn't heard of it and had one of her admirers drive her to the lake. Fine friend he was, leaving her there to be killed."

Stunned as I was, I gasped, "Pat is the beneficiary of Polly's will. Would you have let Pat kill Polly so you could get it all?"

"Indeed not," Janet Orre said indignantly. "Polly is my daughter. I love Polly. We would have contrived a way to get the rest of her fortune. She doesn't need money. Girls like Polly don't need money. But Cran was getting suspicious." Janet Orre lost the wild look for a moment and spoke quietly and confidentially. "You know, Gin, if Cran had confessed we would have had no way of getting either his or Polly's money, for then Polly wouldn't marry Pat."

My blood ran cold, colder than Cran's must have been in the locker. How could she? Her own son! She had killed her husband and put the blame on her unattractive child, hoping to drive him to suicide or maneuver him into signing over his inheritance. If Cran told his secret she and Norman would have nothing to hold over Cran's head. And his secret was so improbable that an investigation would prove him innocent. Then what?

This diabolical woman's greed so revolted me that I was sick with horror and I put out a hand to the end of the dress rack to steady myself. I shouldn't have moved. At the gesture, a torrent of words poured out from Janet Orre's throat, an incomprehensible mixture of accusations and tauntings. As suddenly as the tirade started, it

was stopped and the silence was long and oppressive, broken only by her heavy breathing. Then she lunged.

As I saw the shears flash toward me, self-preservation came to my rescue and I involuntarily lifted a knee. It caught her in the stomach, but the blow only deterred her momentarily and we fought. I had never before fought in my life, but I fought then. When I think of that ghastly scene I can no more describe the thrashing and twisting that I can sing the nightingale's song. I do know that I heard the pounding on the door and Red's voice calling, that I was on the floor when I screamed his name and the door crashed in and Red and Grey Faldman stood over us. But I was upright, held by strong arms, when, with eyes blurred with fright, I looked down at Janet Orre as, with one last frenzied burst of strength, she pulled her arm from a hand that reached to restrain it and plunged the shears into her breast.

Virginia Crane fainted.

12

SIX-THIRTY P.M.

NO Sextons were in their drawing room; only intruders, a motley assemblage of police and unwitting participants in a bizarre crime, sat under the gaze of the green-eyed Sargent portrait. How fortunate it was that her ears came from a paint tube and she couldn't hear what was being said. An officer in plain clothes was speaking.

"Miss Crane has given us an account of her discoveries since Monday night and her unfortunate experience with Mrs. Orre, who, I have just been informed, died half an hour ago at St. Mary's hospital. Miss Crane's intrepid courage has been helpful in our search for the identity of the murdered woman and in getting evidence against the murderer. We are grateful. Have you anything more to add, Miss Crane?"

"Nothing more," I said, blushing with embarrassment at his praise.

"Mr. Ponell, will you please give us your account of what happened this afternoon—the attempt at another murder?"

Felix leaned forward in his chair toward the stenographer, who sat at a card table.

"Sharpen your pencil, young fellow," he said. "I have more to say than an accounting for this afternoon. I am a talkative old man, though I will make it as short as possible."

Felix leaned back in the chair, crossed his legs, folded his hands in his lap and started his story.

"I am the son of magicians and have never been to

school. My tutor was a dwarf who traveled with our troupe, a scholar and a lover of birds. He taught me to revere language for its own sake and to love birds for their sake, but he did not teach me my profession and would have been heartbroken had he lived to know what his pupil chose to do. I am, or was, a pickpocket and an excellent one—if I may be excused for taking pride in an illegal, but exciting and often rewarding profession.

"The man who directed the pickpockets and, I may say, protected them, was Frank Getzler. I was one of the few who knew his identity and that only because I was one of the most valued field workers. I could be trusted to carry on should something happen to him.

"Four years ago, on November the eleventh, while standing with him at a window on the eleventh floor of a Manhattan hotel, we saw a man leaning out a window across the courtyard. We saw a woman come from behind and push him. We saw him hurtle to the pavement below.

"Eight months later I read that Norman Orre had married Whitney Sexton's widow. Whitney Sexton was the unfortunate man who had been pushed. I had never heard of Norman Orre and as there were no pictures printed in any of the nation's newspapers—how he managed that, I'll never know—I had no way of knowing that Norman Orre was Frank Getzler, for I had given up my vocation because of illness and was devoting my time to birds.

"On Monday evening I was flying to Cincinnati to discuss a bird sanctuary with Miss Eva Sexton, whose house guest I was to be. My seat companion was Miss Virginia Crane. The city from which she came was the only city in which I had ever suffered the ignominy of being caught. And ignominy it was, for I was put in a police lineup under blinding lights with exceedingly unsavory drunks, derelicts and petty crooks.

"A remark of Miss Crane's made me aware that she knew my identity. Perhaps she had seen me or heard me described. I am not exactly inconspicuous. However, she didn't know that I was aware of her identity until

we parted. The moment she gave her name to the airline hostess I recalled her name from the social pages of her city's newspapers.

"On Tuesday evening, the Misses Sexton had a family dinner in honor of their niece and I was overwhelmed with coincidence. Miss Crane was to be maid of honor in Miss Polly Sexton's wedding and Mr. Norman Orre was Frank Getzler. You can imagine my astonishment. Miss Crane, with unique poise in one so young, acknowledged an introduction to me, and Norman Orre, having cultivated poise for fifty years, also acknowledged an introduction. Polly Sexton's fiancé, Patrick Wiere, was vaguely familiar and not until the next morning was I able to place him in my memory. I had seen him the night of Mr. Sexton's death. He and a young woman were coming down the corridor of the hotel as I went to Frank Getzler's room on the night of Whitney Sexton's murder. They had come out of the door I was to enter. He was, no doubt, one of us, a bright young man who was being groomed for assisting in the management. I did not know he was Frank's son."

Felix paused, uncrossed and recrossed his legs and looked around at his listeners with deliberation. I caught Red's eye and raised my eyebrows, trying to convey to him how right I was to like this interesting little man. He got the message and actually smiled and nodded with approval. Felix continued.

"When I remembered where I had seen Patrick Wiere I began to wonder about the young woman who had been found that morning, murdered, behind the boathouse at Arrowhead Hill. Could she possibly have been the young woman I had seen coming down that hotel corridor? Could she have heard of the imminent marriage, demanded payment for silence? Could there be more blackmail? I say more, for I was sure, without being told, that Frank Getzler had blackmailed Mrs. Sexton into marriage—and gentlemen, having lived in that shady place known as the underworld, I am not naïve. Blackmail is profitable, easy, and it has a chain reaction. I know about you; you know about someone

else; he knows about someone else, and so on. If there is a money tree, everyone wants at least one twig. So the next morning I went to the morgue. Perhaps I could identify the body. But the dead young woman had a blonde bob and Patrick Wiere's companion had had long, dark hair streaming over her shoulders. I had seen her so fleetingly I could remember no feature, not even recall her height nor details of her figure, only her long, dark hair. Though I am knowing about crime, as a bachelor I am as innocent as an infant about women's guiles and the feminine compulsion that dictates constant change in the length of a skirt, the drape of a dress, the color of hair. I decided the murder had had nothing to do with Frank or Patrick and I would keep silent. Who was I, flying under false colors, to point a long finger of disapproval at a man who had always fulfilled his obligations with honor?

"There is honor among thieves. However, that honor is only among thieves and I thought it kind to warn Miss Crane, advise her to keep my identity a secret, for if I was wrong, if the murder had had something to do with those in this house, she might have been in danger if they thought she had knowledge of their identities.

"Though I have lived outside the law, murder, gentlemen, is not something I condone. You ask, then, why I did not go to the authorities with my knowledge of Whitney Sexton's murder? I am a coward like most men. I could not afford to let the police know I was in that hotel, in what room or with whom. But even though Miss Eva Sexton might learn about my former profession, if there was the slightest possibility that her niece was marrying a murderer, I had to prevent that marriage. I also had to prevent anything untoward from happening to Miss Crane.

"I dismissed it all from my mind after visiting the morgue and I accompanied the Misses Sexton to the wedding this afternoon full of anticipation. I would have the opportunity to see the site that Miss Eva might possibly be able to acquire for the sanctuary. Miss Crane was my guide to the lake and she brought me back to

reality with a question. Why, she asked, did Patrick Wiere and Janet Orre react so violently when the name Getzler was mentioned? I feel sure now that the question was deliberately asked to get my reaction and, I regret to say, my poise was shaken. We sparred. I find her an alert and interesting sparring partner. She was trying to discover what I knew, I trying to pierce her guile. I warned her again to be wary and that, unless something unusual happened soon that would explain everything, she must continue to be wary.

"During our sparring she remarked that the murdered woman had not been a natural blonde but had had dark hair. I had the feeling that someone was giving her information. I didn't know then that it was one of my favorite journalists—Mulvaney. Before she returned to the house I knew, intuitively, that the dead woman had been known to either Norman Orre or Patrick Wiere and I was pondering on how I could stop the marriage, for stop it I must if murder was involved.

"Soon after Miss Crane left, Norman Orre appeared. He must have been close by, must have seen Miss Crane escort me, then leave. We conversed pleasantly, each knowing without saying it that we would keep each other's identity a secret, though I must admit I was plotting my course of action. During the conversation I realized it was time for an insulin shot and as I prefer giving it to myself in privacy, I walked around the boathouse, where I was out of sight, so Patrick Wiere did not see me when he dashed into the clearing and said, 'Dad, I managed it. Simple. Cran won't talk today—maybe never. I knocked him out and put him in the freezer. They won't find him for hours, perhaps not until tomorrow, and they'll think he was drunk, wandered in by mistake, fell, hurt himself—concussion!' 'You—fool, never speak until you know we're alone!' Norman said.

" 'Aren't we?' " Pat asked.

"There were no more words. What pantomime went on between father and son I could not see, but before I could put the hypodermic where it belonged Norman was around the boathouse and had me pinioned. Patrick

held me down and Norman shot every vial of insulin I had with me into my veins. Norman knew that I would go into shock and die before anyone would find me. And when I was found, hadn't an old, forgetful diabetic given himself an overdose of insulin?

"That young man"—he pointed to Grey Faldman—"saved my life. He found me before I lost consciousness and I still had enough strength left to whisper that he must bring sugar or orange juice quickly. He brought orange juice. You know the rest."

There was a long silence as we all shifted positions and thought our private thoughts. Then the officer said, "Thank you, Mr. Ponell. Giving state's evidence will serve you in good stead."

Felix sighed regretfully and gently stroked his beard. "To think that I, one of the most proficient pickpockets on two continents, would ever be a stool pigeon."

"Have you anything to say in your defense, Frank Getzler—Albert Getzler?" the officer asked, directing his words to Norman and Pat, who sat side by side on a couch, handcuffed together.

"Not until I speak with my lawyer," Norman answered with the same suave, courtly voice he had used on Monday night when he had taken both of my hands in his and said, "How we've looked forward to seeing you."

13

MIDNIGHT

THE scratching of Red's pencil on paper couldn't be heard above the noise of the airplane motors. He had called in his story to the *Star,* but had been writing at high speed for over an hour, scribbling down details for a feature no other reporter in the country would be able to duplicate.

He finished, closed the notebook, stuck it and the pencil in his pocket, pushed the release button on his seat and pushed back so that our heads were on the same level.

"I hope Aunt Gwen and Aunt Eva get to bless Polly's wedding dress when she marries Grey," I said.

"When will that be?" Red asked.

"They haven't set the date," I answered. "And isn't it a shame the wedding supper can't be preserved as well as the dress? Where do you suppose all the guests had dinner tonight?"

"There's always a Howard Johnson," Red said.

"Do you suppose the caterers will repair the cake icing and use the cake for another bride?"

"Why would they repair the icing? The cake wasn't cut."

"I stuck my finger in it," I said.

"It's not exciting enough for you to stick your finger in people's business, you must stick it in their cake as well." He turned his head slightly and looked at me. "Gin, how many more stinking-rich people do you know?"

"None. Unless it's you. This story should help you up

the ladder to the city editor's desk and certainly get you a raise."

"I hadn't given it a thought. Say—if I get a raise I might be able to buy you a diamond. On the instalment plan, of course."

"I don't want a diamond."

"No. Diamonds are hackneyed—prosaic. The Kohinoor wouldn't satisfy you. You'll settle for nothing less than a ruby from the British Crown jewels."

"I don't want any jewel at all. I want a poodle with a white topknot and a white beard."

"Ruffles?"

"Ruffles."

Red closed his eyes and sighed contentedly.

"Actually," he said, "the FBI should present you with Ruffles out of gratitude, but I won't suggest it to them. I'd rather give him to you myself. I've known since Tamara walked out on me that I was destined to marry a girl who walks her engagement ring on the end of a leash."

The *MYSTERY* of *ARROWHEAD HILL*

Naturally, Virginia Crane was delighted when she was chosen as maid of honor by her former college roommate. But then Ginny met the bridegroom-to-be. Patrick Wiere was sinister, definitely not the boy for Polly Sexton.

Gin hurriedly got off a letter to Red Mulvaney, crack news reporter, reconstructing the situation at Arrowhead hill – and adding that Felix Ponell, whom she knew to be the head of a former crime ring, was staying with Polly's aunts. Ponell and one of the Misses Sexton, amateur ornithologists, hoped to establish a bird sanctuary near the lake at Arrowhead Hill.

It was near this lake that Gin and Gre Faldman discovered the body of a dead girl . . and though, on the surface, she seemed to hav no connection with Arrowhead, Gin realized tha somehow the girl's murder had been caused b the forthcoming wedding.

P9-DCD-978

ANOTHER *Mystery House* THRILLER